

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Dr. Vincie Ho. She is the found and executive director of [RISE Travel Institute](#), an educational nonprofit that aims to inspire responsible, impactful, sustainable and ethical travel. Rise envisions a world where travel is a force of positive transformation for both travelers and travel destinations and offers an online certificate program in sustainability and anti-oppression in travel. Originally from Hong Kong, Vincie worked as a linguist and French lecturer at the University of Hong Kong before transitioning into the nonprofit space to focus on human rights education, refugee advocacy, and empowerment of vulnerable communities around the world. After relocating to the United States in 2014, she dedicated her educational focus to sustainable travel and tourism rooted in social, animal and environmental justice in order to provide travelers with the knowledge and tools to visit places more mindfully and ethically. She speaks five languages; Cantonese, Mandarin, Thai, French, and English, in which we'll be conducting this interview today. She holds a PhD in linguistics, a graduate certificate from the Institute for Humane Education, and a professional certificate in sustainable tourism.

Vincie, welcome to the show.

Vincie Ho: Hi, Matt. Thank you for having me.

Matt Bowles: Thank you for being here. You are doing such inspiring and amazing things. I'm super excited to have you on the show. But let's just start this off talking about where we are today. Unfortunately, we are not in person, so let's just set the scene here. I am actually in the Piedmont region of Italy. I am in the city of Alba in the northwest part of Italy at the base of the Barbaresco and Barolo wine regions today. And where are you?

Vincie Ho: Matt can see me rolling my eyes. I so wished I were there with you in Italy. I'm in New Jersey in the United States. This is where me and my husband live with our two dogs. We live right across the Hudson River from Columbia University, Manhattan.

Matt Bowles: Nice. I get down to New Jersey probably at least once a year. My sister is in New Jersey right now, so I've got some family there. And so, I tend to swing through your hood just about annually. So, we need to connect the next time?

Vincie Ho: Yes. You should definitely let me know when you swing by next time.

Matt Bowles: Well, let's start this off. I know that you are into skydiving and paragliding, Vincie, and I want to start right there. I have paraglided once. I will say now that on the other side of it that I'm glad that I did it. It was quite an extraordinary experience. It was also one of the most nerve-wracking experiences because you basically put a parachute on your back and run off of a cliff, which when you're doing it for the first time was kind of crazy. But you, I know, have done this multiple times, you've skydived, you jump out of airplanes. Can you talk a little bit about your experience doing that and what you love about that?

Vincie Ho: For paragliding, I actually took a 10-day course in Thailand with an ex-Navy Seal. He is one of the kindest people that I've ever met on earth and his name is Thumb. You know, all Thai people have very long names, so they all have nicknames. So, his name is Thumb, like Thumbs up. And he is just so kind. We're so very good friends. We chat every once in a while, and every time I go back to Thailand, I'll go see him. So, I took the course in a small village, I think about two, three hours from Bangkok. And it's a fishing village and there was a family of fishermen. And every day after eight hours of practicing on the beach, I would hang out with the family, drinking beers and eating their local food, like freshy cool, whatever from the sea that day. It's just one of the best trips that I've ever had, really. And at the time I could speak a little

bit of Thai, not very fluently, so I just communicated with them in my broken Thai. And it was just so lovely and well, in terms of paragliding, I thought it would be more nerve wracking, but I actually love it. Like the feeling of being in the air, being airborne and it's really peaceful. It's not that fast, right? Well, skydiving is totally different. Skydiving, jump off the plane and then until you pull open the parachute. So skydiving, I did that twice. Once in near LA and the other time in Australia with my best friends.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. Yeah, I agree. I mean, the paragliding, once you've actually run off the cliff and the parachute catches and then you're just sitting there and you're just floating, it is an unbelievably peaceful, completely silent and remarkable experience when you're just like suspended in the air over some gorgeous scenery. I did it in Medellin, Colombia, and just like right over the valley and you're looking down, it was just amazing. So, once you're up there, it's lovely. It's the running off the cliff and having confidence that the parachute is definitely going to catch is the part, but once it does, then you're good. So totally.

Vincie Ho: I cannot agree more with you. That's exactly how it feels. Yes.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. Well, you are originally from Hong Kong. Can you share a little bit about just your experience? Let's just go all the way back. Just sort of growing up in Hong Kong and how your interest in travel and other cultures initially started to develop, when you think back.

Vincie Ho: Yeah. So, I was born and raised in Hong Kong. I started to travel at the age of 8 or 9. My parents just, you know, we're from a modest family, but they really try to save up and so that me and my brother had the chance to travel. So, the first time that I took a plane, I think it was to Hokkaido, Japan, and it was in the middle of winter. And the fact that my parents chose that time is because, you know, as kids, we never saw snow. Like, we had never seen snow before. So, my mom, she got all excited before the trip, like, getting us, like, all these warm boots and ear muffs. And hey, I've never seen those things before in my whole life. Because Hong Kong has a subtropical and now moving towards a more tropical climate. Due to climate change. And it was very exciting. You know, I was a kid, right.

So, I still got to enjoy seeing snow, playing in the snow, and then playing with all the other kids on our tour as well. So that was my first experience getting out of Hong Kong. And then we went to several other places with the parents. You know, they took us to Europe when we were older. But still, back in the days, families traveling together, they wouldn't think about other options than joining an organized tour. So, it was a tour to Europe, basically stopping in a city for one day and then move on to the next. So, the time that I really got to travel and get to know people from other cultures was when I went to study in France. That was my first time being on my own, having a chance to interact with the locals and basically not just going to one place for a day, but staying in a place for longer so that I can get to see different sites, even like including off the beaten paths and also really talking to the locals and making friends.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I think the study abroad is such a game changer. When I was in college, I went to Ireland and I'm Irish American as well, so it had an added layer of significance for me. But I studied at Trinity College in Dublin for a year, you know, so you're on your own, you're in a foreign country. And then my roommate and I took the winter break. We took the month, and we just got Eurail tickets and just backpacked through Europe for the month. Which of course is just mind blowing. It's the first time you've ever done it at that age, and it's incredible. So, it was just such a special experience at that age and really just lit so many fires for me.

Vincie Ho: Exactly. I still remember those Eurail train tickets. You have to like, basically mark crosses and put the dates on the paper ticket by yourself.

Matt Bowles: Right.

Vincie Ho: Kids today, it would be so hard for them to imagine how we used to travel when we didn't have a cell phone, when we didn't have Internet and all we had was probably one or two guidebooks and a paper map.

Matt Bowles: Yeah.

Vincie Ho: No GPS, no nothing.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. I did it in the late 90s. It was when this happened. And I still wonder, like, how did I do that? You know? Like today I'm like, if I had no smartphone and I had no Google Maps and I had no Google Translate and I had no any of this other stuff, how would I do it?

Vincie Ho: Yeah, exactly.

Matt Bowles: The other thing I want to ask you about, when you think back through your study abroad experience and beyond, is how your social and political consciousness developed. Can you take us a little bit on that journey?

Vincie Ho: Absolutely. I actually went to study in France after my undergraduate studies in Hong Kong. So that was very late, you know, comparing to a lot of people who would go on a gap year when they are younger. But I actually went after my undergraduate studies, so I thought I did pretty well in school. And when I went to France, I just suddenly realized that I couldn't participate in any conversations that my friends were having, like, about politics or history or just basically anything about current affairs. I had no idea. And I just realized, wow, Vincie, yes, you may do well in school. You could get straight A's in all your grammar or language classes, but because there's no substance in your head, you can't even engage in normal conversation with adults. And I started to realize that, wow, you can be highly educated in a very specific or specialized discipline, but you can also be ignorant at the same time. Like, you have no idea of what's going on in the world.

So that was pretty much a wakeup call for me. I was in Europe. French people love talking about politics. And also, it was the first time that I had a Jewish friend and I had some Muslim friends. And what happened one day was at the graduate center that we were studying at, it was a cohort of some 30 French teachers or aspiring French teachers. So, I think it was close to the end of our course or our program. We were planning a graduation party, and then we were making T-shirts for the group. So, the student who was in charge of designing the T-shirt, she collected everybody's names and then where they were from. And then we printed everybody's names and their countries of origins on the T-shirt. And then I believe that she purposely put a Palestinian colleague or student's name after Israel. And I had no idea what was going on. And our Palestinian friend, she was like, in tears when she saw that. I just didn't know why. I just realized that, wow, I need to educate myself.

And then from then on, I started to read a lot more, visited, like, museums and talk with friends. There are things that I don't understand. I just ask them. And sometimes, now, looking back, I know that it's not the responsibility to educate me neither. You don't always ask people from the oppressive populations to teach you how to be mindful with them and their history and their sufferings. Let's say it was the turning

point for me. And then I started to really follow the news. And then I saw the Rwandan genocide unfolding on TV every day. I had no idea I just knew there were killings, but it was actually 800,000 Tutsis being killed by machetes within 100 days.

When I was going to college, I was a student having a mundane life. All that preoccupied me was the grades that I got and then my relationships with my friends. And that was pretty much it. I didn't care a lot more about anything outside of my own circle. But starting to be aware of what's going on around the world makes you realize that it's not just about you in this world. There's so much happening and people are suffering, and there's got to be something that you can do to contribute to the greater good, even if that just means that you pay more attention to what's happening as the first step.

Matt Bowles: In terms of understanding the underlying causes of conflict and oppression, can you talk a little bit about the uprising in Hong Kong?

Vincie Ho: Sure. So back in 2014, we had the umbrella movement too. So, it's not like protests was all of a sudden something new. The Hong Kong people has been known for being really into protest for 20 years, ever since the handover of Hong Kong from the British back to the Chinese. But in 2019, there was this anti extradition law amendment bill movement. And that sparked a series of really bad clashes between the police and protesters and escalating protests from 2019 to June 2020, when the new draconian National Security Law was passed. So, what happened was Hong Kong people were afraid that by making an amendment to the extradition law, the Hong Kong government would have the power to just extradite anyone back to mainland China. And since the judicial system in mainland China is very different from the one in Hong Kong still, so people are afraid that will be used as a tool to silent political dissidents. And the implication is huge.

And also, because China has been tightening its grip on Hong Kong and we are losing our press freedom. And we feel that there's an increasing level of censorship in our education system, in our press, and also in our electoral system as well. So young people are just frustrated, and they really want to be able to safeguard their rights and their freedom. So, they take to the streets because their voices are not heard. So, the protests just kept escalating. And then at the beginning, Hong Kong people were known for being the most peaceful protesters in the world. We could take to the street, like 2 million people in the street, and there's no violence in those protests. Then violence started to break out, and then civil disobedience acts were staged, and then the young people were radicalized because they didn't feel heard.

So, there's a huge divide now in Hong Kong between people who think that the young people are wrong because they are inciting violence and they're attacking the police. But then on the other hand, there are people who understand a little more like the underlying causes of why young people do that. And it's because young people are totally aware of their responsibilities when they break the law. They are ready to be held accountable. But what they're really not happy about is that the law enforcers are not held accountable when they break the law. So, there's this vicious cycle. The more the protest went on, the angrier the people got. So, between 2019 and 2020, every weekend, there were protests staged, and then they were dispersed by tear gas. And it just kept repeating until that law got passed all of a sudden, overnight, it was because of COVID too. The pandemic hit, and it was a convenient excuse to basically ban people from gathering in all sorts of public assemblies are now impossible since then.

Matt Bowles: And then, I know you also had a major life and career sort of pivot around 2010. Can you talk a little bit about your career trajectory from there kind of leading up to that and then what it was that sort of really inspired that pivot?

Vincie Ho: Yeah. So, in 2010, it was a time when I had already taught French at a university for about 10 years, and I was. I started to think about what I wanted next in my life because I could just stay in that position till I die. You know how academia works, right? If you don't make serious mistakes, if you don't want to leave, then you can be there for life. So, I really enjoyed teaching. I love the French language. I love my colleagues, my students. And it's because I really love my students so much that I thought they're going to be something more like beyond the language classroom that I can inspire them with. And I don't just want them to think that, okay, learning French is all about cheese and wine. And I mean, I love, don't get me wrong.

Matt Bowles: Some of it's about cheese and wine.

Vincie Ho: Yeah. I love the French culture. Well, pop culture or history and everything. But I love how it feels to be traveling in France in all the beautiful castles and places. But it's not just about that. I want them to also be able to see the world and make use of hopefully the new foreign language to do something rather than just making use of it to travel and indulge in cheese and wine, which I love, too. But it's exactly because of how I moved from being a completely ignorant university student to someone a little more awakened and really hungry for the understanding of social justice issues around the world. I don't want them to miss that, too. So, I was thinking, okay, what can I do outside of the language classroom and maybe I should go take a course on human rights education and see how I can pivot my career in education a little bit towards social justice, not just purely linguistics.

Oh, and also because I was also a linguistic researcher and every year I go to these international conferences and you have like a room full of experts in the discipline, and we talk about very specific things like super theological, theoretical, that people outside of room probably wouldn't understand what we talk about. So, when I got my PhD in linguistics, my mom asked me a question and she's like, wow, I'm so proud of you. You're like our first PhD in the family. But what is this Thesis about, I could not explain to her in the most layperson terms because it's so specific, so theoretical. And I think her question just was also another wake-up call. Because if I continue in that role, yes, I'm very passionate about what I was doing. But again, what I wrote or my thesis eventually is going to just sit in the library where maybe 10 people in the whole world would consult every year. And maybe once in a while, someone might get interested in the topic which I wrote was actually about the grammar of Cantonese tones and canto pop music.

So, it's a phonological analysis of how the tones of the words are mapped to the melody of music. And it's a very fascinating topic. I was using the optimality theory, a theory in linguistics that I was passionate about, to kind of account for all the patterns in the interface between Russian music in my language. But yeah, and then what? Right? What do people get out of it? How many people can really benefit from my research on this whole world? Yes, maybe some of them. It really has a lot of academic value in it, but I want to do. I want to be able to touch people's hearts. I want to be able to connect with people. I don't want to just, like, sit in my office and keep writing research papers. So that was what also motivated me to just completely leave academia and seek out what I could do in terms of human rights education.

Matt Bowles: Well, one of the places that you went and used your French language was Senegal in West Africa, which is one of my favorite countries. I just went there for the first time in 2019, and I spent a month

in Dakar. It was just really won my heart. I mean, what a special place. And I've been telling everybody about it since my trip there. And it's, of course, a Francophone country and a former French colony. So, I'm curious, given all of that context that you just gave when you went to Senegal, can you talk about what the experience was like there and also what you were doing there and talk a little bit about your refugee empowerment work?

Vincie Ho: Absolutely. So, I left academia and did an international course at United Nations University in Japan for a summer, and then immediately went to Senegal. I was in Dakar and worked for a grassroots nonprofit that provides legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees. It's a very small grassroots nonprofit, meaning that was only the founder, basically, and two interns. One, I was one of them. And then there was another American girl who became a good friend of mine, and she's a lot younger than me, but she's now a lawyer. So, we were there, and everything was just so different from what I was expecting. We were staying in Dakar, and the first day. The first day I arrived there, my boss and his assistant came to pick me up at the airport. The lights were so dim. It was so dark. I just couldn't see. They were holding a piece of paper with my name on, but I couldn't see anything. So, someone approached me, and then I said, hey, are you Jibril? And then he went, yes, yes, come with me. And then he was leading me to a taxi. I'm like, wait a minute. I'm not even sure if that was him. So immediately, two guys just ran after me and said, hey, Vincie, what are you doing? Come over here. That's just a taxi driver who wanted to take you.

So, yeah, I got saved, and we immediately went to a DB restaurant. And then immediately, the first night was, like, really getting acquainted, getting to know each other. And I immediately knew that I love this boss already because he's a drinker. And then we were talking passionately about the refugee issue, like global refugee crisis and everything in Darfur and South Sudan. And I moved into a hostel where there were some other African asylum seekers and people, like, staying in the same hostel as I did. And I got to know friends there. And at work, what we did was taking testimonies and listening to people tell their stories. So that was really an experience that made me realize how important it is to listen to people's stories and to just let them tell their own stories and not to tell them what we want to do for you, but what you want us to do for you.

And in the trip to Rwanda after that, I volunteered in an orphanage. And now I know, looking back, it's the worst thing ever that one could have done. But back in the days, I didn't know that it was wrong with all the good intentions, right? So volunteered in an orphanage, realized that there was actually nothing that I could help. I'm not a healthcare professional, so when the kids were sick, I couldn't really take care of them. I took them to the nearby hospitals, but someone had to come with me because I couldn't speak the local language. So, I was basically useless there.

So, experience like that, I realized that it's just really important. And to understand your place in Rwanda, we decided to buy the kids chicken so that, you know, there's a sustainable food source of the hens can lay eggs so that every day they have eggs to eat, but then the next day they kill that chicken. So, we didn't even ask what they wanted. Maybe it wasn't the eggs that they wanted. And the communication was not there, so they didn't know the intention behind us getting the chicken for them. So, it was very awakening experience in Rwanda and also in Senegal just to realize that you are not there to help. You're there to listen to their stories and see what they want and then we'll see how we can support them.

Matt Bowles: In terms of some of the reflections and lessons from these experiences and how that shaped the things that you would do next. And what are the things that you have done with [RISE Travel Institute](#) that I've really appreciated in terms of how you talk about travel and how you frame travel. Is that

it's not just leisure and tourism, but you actually talk about travel as including migration and forced displacement. And RISE is very committed to bringing awareness to the global refugee crisis. Can you, can you talk a little bit about that link and the importance of understanding that link between travel and migration and displacement?

Vincie Ho: Absolutely. Well, travel, the word itself means to move from one place to another. Right? The word travel originally means being somewhere else other than home. If we think of travel in the sense that we are moving from one place to another and that involves a journey. So yes, traveling and forced displacement, a lot of people would only think about leisure travel. When you're away from home, all that you can think of is all the fun and the excitement and the pleasure that you have at the new place. But a lot of people, there are millions of people in this world who have to leave their homes without a choice. And all they need to think about is where to find asylum and think about the resettlement and once they're resettled, how do they integrate into their new homes? So basically, what refugees are experiencing is also a kind of travel. But it's very often, unfortunately, with a lot more traumatic stories to tell rather than IG photos to show people.

Matt Bowles: And therefore, can you also talk a little bit about you alluded to some of the shortcomings and unsustainability and problems with humanitarian approaches or exclusively charitable approaches or voluntourism as a concept. Can you extrapolate on that a little bit and just share a little bit more about that so that well intentioned folks can understand what some of those problems are and also what the alternatives are? And why is it important to understand the underlying causes of some of these conflicts and social justice issues and what is a more appropriate approach to, to try to support and act in solidarity.

Vincie Ho: Absolutely. So, I think we need to move away from the charity mindset. That's the very colonial mindset. If you think about the Haitian earthquake back in 2011, ish, around that time, a lot of people, Americans, they wanted to fly down to Haiti and help and see what we could do. But oftentimes people are under skilled. When you go there, what can you do? Are you going to help rescue people from the rubbles when you are not a medical doctor? When you are not a nurse? When you don't have any specific skills, like you're not a translator? You need to think about what is your role in a humanitarian crisis. Would your presence or your visit there actually be a burden or a support to the local people?

And also, for example, when we say, okay, let's donate clothes to Haiti or to very often people just get rid of what they don't want and say okay and make themselves feel good by saying, I'm donating these things. But think about the clothes, like winter clothes arriving in Haiti. Nobody needs them. They will need to find a way to destroy them because they cannot wear those clothes, right? And imagine the carbon print, like having to ship all these things over there as well. So, before we do something like a challenge charitable act, we also need to think about, yes, you want to be kind, but also think about the consequences. And what you give is what people need. That's the first thing.

And secondly, humanitarian responses are necessary, but it's usually like a band aid solution. When the wound is bleeding, you try to stop it from bleeding. But then we need to understand the underlying causes. Why are there more casualties in Haiti after the earthquake than a similar earthquake happening in a developed country. It's because of the infrastructure. So, if we really want to help, let's see how we can support vulnerable communities to build better infrastructure or to empower them so that they can be more resilient to natural disasters.

Matt Bowles: All right, so let's talk a little bit about [RISE Travel Institute](#) and let's start with the founding of it, which was during the pandemic. Can you talk a little bit about sort of the lead up to that, what led up to the founding of RISE, and also talk a little bit about the significance of the timing and why you founded it in 2020.

Vincie Ho: Yes. So, I had always wanted to build a curriculum around sustainable travel because there are a lot of resources online. But I just felt that if I could build a curriculum and go to schools and teach teachers and students about what sustainable travel really means, that would be really cool. Rather than them having to proactively look for resources. But then I waited for a long time when I was moved to the United States in 2014, I didn't have a network here, so I didn't know anyone. And slowly I started to volunteer for IMPACT Travel alliance. And I started to really build a network of people, like-minded people who work in sustainable travel. So, I gathered my resources and in 2020, I felt ready to start something.

And it was also because of a pandemic that everyone was for once really grounded and not flying and not going anywhere, myself included. So, I had the time to think about starting an organization. And why in the middle of the pandemic, it was very counterintuitive because tourism businesses were furloughing people and closing down and not having any businesses and everything was brought to a standstill. But I just thought, but it could be the best time to talk about ethical travel and to educate travelers who now have the time to get more prepared, to get to learn to be more mindful before they go on their next trip after the pandemic. So that was how I started [RISE Travel Institute](#) in June 2020.

Matt Bowles: Well, let's talk a little bit about some of the amazing and super important stuff that RISE does. First of all, it is an acronym. So, RISE stands for *Responsible, Impactful, Sustainable and Ethical*. So, I want to break down some of those concepts and maybe we should just start with talking about what are some examples of some unsustainable tourism practices. Can you share a little bit about over tourism and some of the other challenges that RISE is seeking to educate about and address?

Vincie Ho: Sure. I mean, the conventional tourism business model is based on a very extractive model, like bringing tourists to a place and only thinking about pleasing the tourists, disregarding their impact on the local communities and biodiversity and the environment. So, if we imagine Santorini in Greece, perfect picturesque Greek island that is so popular every year, I don't know how many millions of travelers would go there. And there are a few spots on the island really best known for the best angle to take pictures of the island, right? It's impossible to get to those spots because it's always like cramped with people, like with their selfie stick and everything. And then when you go to the main street, you can see that there are more and more foreign cuisines, restaurants to cater to tourist taste. And then cities and places or countries will start to lose their uniqueness because of the demand of tourists.

So, the presence of tourists is actually really changing the landscapes or cityscapes of many places. And also, the demand of Airbnb's actually is driving a lot of local people out of a lot of city centers because they can no longer afford to have property in the places that they used to live. And also, like biodiversity as well, right? When you have all of a sudden, let's say there's a pristine sandy beach and all of a sudden, all these people just go to these beaches and basically flood them with tourists and then driving the cost of living up as well. So, there are a lot of examples of unsustainable tourism practices, including the use of animals in tourism attractions, taking pictures with tigers, baby tigers, riding elephants. And some conscious tourists nowadays would choose to move away from those activities, but the majority of people are still doing those things.

Matt Bowles: One of the things that you talk about and that [RISE Travel Institute](#) has prioritized educating about is this concept of regenerative tourism. Can you talk about what that means and give some examples of what that would look like?

Vincie Ho: Sure. So, as I just said, the mainstream tourism business model is based on an extractive model, like taking what they can take from travel destinations. But the regenerative tourism model is really to move beyond just minimizing our negative impact or carbon footprint, but really thinking about how tourism can be a force for good in terms of empowering the local communities and how tourism can contribute to building a more thriving destination. So regenerative model is about not only mitigating our negative impact, but maximizing our benefits as well at the tourism destination.

Matt Bowles: And let's talk about maybe some specific ways that we as travelers can think about doing that if we want to be more sustainable travelers. What are some specific things that we can do to contribute to a regenerative tourism model and a sustainable travel experience?

Vincie Ho: The most important thing I would say is to really do your research before you travel. Do research and understand the history and what's going on currently at your travel destination and research what community led tourism or indigenous led tourism businesses that you can support. Rather than just joining tours run by multinational companies or like always staying in hotel chains, support the local communities by staying in a family-owned hotel, for example, and eating and shopping locally. And that's also the best way to communicate and to interact with the locals and listen to their stories and learn from them as well. And also, before you go to a place, you can also research what sustainable long term community development projects that you can get involved with or support.

Matt Bowles: And I know that the concept of sustainable travel, one of the things that you've emphasized is that we're not just talking about environmental, mental Sustainability, it goes far beyond that to the social and political and the treatment of animals and all of this. And so when we bring in the responsible part and the impactful part and the ethical part and the multifaceted of sustainability, you sort of talk about this concept of understanding that there are interconnected systems of oppression in the travel and tourism industry and the importance of understanding that and then developing an anti-oppression lens through which to see and understand those and make decisions. So, can you share a little bit about that, sort of unpack that for us a little bit?

Vincie Ho: Absolutely. So, when we talk about sustainable travel, we don't only look at our impact on the environment, but also our impact on the local communities and animals. And we look at everything holistically from a systems perspective. And what that means is when we look at climate change, we don't just calculate our carbon footprint and say, okay, I've offset my footprint and I can now travel guilt free. We need to understand the consequences of climate change, how it impacts affects the most vulnerable communities around the world disproportionately and the communities that we're visiting, right? So, we need to understand the link between climate change and climate justice.

Or when we talk about boycotting elephant riding, yes, we want to move away from that activity because we think it's cruel to the elephants. But when we altogether like boycott that activity, what about the mahouts who are handling the elephants? What about their livelihood? What about the poor families whose livelihood depends on that one single tourism activity? So, we need to think of things in a holistic way and in an interconnected way so that we can come up with a solution that actually doesn't only prevent animals from suffering, but also prevents the human beings from suffering as well. So, these are

the things that we want people to see, you know, because sometimes we would be very single issue minded and only look at one thing, but then actually there are a lot of different things that are interconnected that we need to take into consideration.

Matt Bowles: Well, you just put out a free video course recently, which I went through and we'll link up in [the show notes](#) so other folks can check it out. And it was about the decision-making process for thoughtful travelers during a pandemic when you're trying to decide if you should travel, where you should travel, when you should travel, and giving people some context for making those types of decisions. And in that training you talked about concepts of global vaccine inequity and vaccine apartheid and you contextualize that in the landscape of neocolonialism. And I thought it was really helpful. But can you just share a little bit for folks here about what some of those terms mean and what some of the decision-making concepts people may want to consider when making travel decisions during the pandemic?

Vincie Ho: Sure, yeah. So global vaccine inequity is the current situation that we have right now in terms of vaccine rollout. As many of us in high income countries have already had our two shots of the COVID 19 vaccines. Actually only 5% of people in low-income countries have had their first COVID 19 vaccines. So that means there's a huge disparity in terms of vaccine rollout. And high-income countries have been hoarding vaccines and a lot of low-income countries do not have access to the protection that they need. So, when we talk about how we relate this to the new colonial mindset, it's basically how the leaders of the high-income countries using their wealth to make bilateral deals with pharmaceutical companies. And of course, once they've invested so much money, like billions of dollars into developing these technologies, they would want to keep all or most of the vaccines for their own people.

And therefore, populations in high income countries have access to these vaccines also at more affordable prices as well rather than low-income countries. They now have to like, you know, some governments have to pay a premium to these pharmaceutical companies to get the vaccines to their people. So, travelers just need to be more aware of these things that is going on because now borders are reopening again and people are thinking about traveling again. But a lot of people are not thinking whether it's ethical to travel to a place where the vaccine rollout is still low. Even though we're fully vaccinated, we can still be a carrier of the virus and it's just that we won't get very sick, but we can pass it on to the people of the populations that are not protected at all.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I thought your video course was super helpful for me in terms of making my own travel decisions. So, we're going to link that up in [the show notes](#). It's totally free. People can just go check it out and watch it. Can you also talk about some of the other tools and resources and education that [RISE Travel Institute](#) provides and how people can get more involved and check out your content.

Vincie Ho: Absolutely, I'd love to. So, at [RISE Travel Institute](#) this past summer, we just launched our first pilot program which was a 10-week certificate program in sustainability and anti-oppression in travel. And within the program we talked a lot about revisiting our power and privilege and our relationship with the world. As we travel and we also touch on animals and tourism, we talk about climate change and climate justice. We talked about voluntourism, like a variety of topics that are related to social justice, animal justice and environmental justice and travel. So that program will be rebranded as our flagship program and will be offered twice a year, in spring and in fall. Throughout the year we'll have short courses on various topics about sustainable travel, some of which I just mentioned.

And then in 2022, we have a very excited new series of short courses on destinations. And what that means is, for example, our first destination course will be on Guatemala. And we will be partnering with a social good travel business, an award-winning local travel business that works closely with indigenous communities. So, we're going to build a course on Guatemala and take students on a deep dive into the history of Guatemala and also the legacy of colonialism, and also all the social, political, economic and environmental issues that are still affecting the local population. So that in the future, whenever a traveler wants to travel to Guatemala, they can take out a course and get informed and get educated about the history.

And also, we're going to curate some projects, you know, sustainable community development projects that travelers can contribute to or get involved in when they travel there. So, there will be a lot of tips on how to travel more mindfully and specific destinations. And in 2022, already in the pipeline, we're going to have destination course on Costa Rica and then we got to have courses on New Zealand, Peru, Thailand, Bhutan. But yeah, it's all very exciting. Hopefully we're going to add at least five destination courses per year in the next five years to come. We are very excited about it.

Matt Bowles: That's so awesome. Well, one of the amazing things that you have done with RISE, in my opinion, is attracted such incredible people to be involved. Can you talk a little bit about how RISE has grown and evolved just since its founding in 2020 and the types of people that are involved with RISE now?

Vincie Ho: Yes, I cannot be more proud of that aspect of RISE. We have attracted over 40 volunteers to join the team. When we first started, it was only me and two very close friends and mentors in humane education who just helped to form the founding board. But then we immediately put up the website making our mission and vision very clear. And then it just resonates with people. And our founding team members saw our job descriptions and just applied and I didn't know these people. A lot of our senior advisors are actually my connections. But as far as the operations team is concerned, people just saw our mission and really want to be part of it. And today we're some 45 people on the operations team. It's amazing. And they offer from all over the world. It's not just from America, colleagues from India, from South Africa, from Uganda, Japan. We're becoming more and more international, which means finding a time for meetings is also getting more and more difficult. But it's a good challenge.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. That's so awesome. Well, let me ask you this now, Vincie. As you think back on your entire travel journey, how has travel impacted you as a person over the years?

Vincie Ho: Immensely. It changed me completely. I am completely transformed. As I said, if that wasn't a study abroad experience or like traveling in France when I was studying there, I probably wouldn't be who I am today. Without the experiences in Africa or some other low-income countries that I traveled to where I wanted to experience a different way of life, it really opened my eyes. And without those experiences and mistakes that I've made, I also probably wouldn't have started [RISE Travel Institute](#). So, everything that I'm doing right now is related to or thanks to my past travels.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. And what is your future vision for RISE? Where are you taking this in five or 10 years? Where do you see [RISE Travel Institute](#)?

Vincie Ho: I am confident that we're going to be able to take RISE to the next level, meaning that more and more travelers will become aware of the courses and the curriculum that we have and what we have to offer and to be more mindful. So, like, you know, my goal is really to create a global community of mindful

travelers through our curriculum. And hopefully we're going to continue to expand our curriculum. As I just mentioned, with the destination courses, there's a huge potential to continue to add courses to our curriculum and also continue to use our curriculum as a platform for local people around the world to tell their own stories, talk about their own history, and educate travelers who are traveling to those places.

Matt Bowles: And you are a 501(c)(3) tax deductible non-profit organization. So, if folks are interested in supporting the mission of RISE, either through donations, financially or volunteering, what's the best way to support RISE?

Vincie Ho: Yes. So, as you said, there are many ways to support RISE. You can volunteer with us if you have four hours per week and if you have the right skill sets, then you can join our team from anywhere in the world. And then, yes, you can definitely donate. We are 501(c) non-profit. And one way to support is also just to take out courses. The more courses that you take, the more education that you receive that would benefit yourself and also our students because we have tuition grants and we offer travel scholarships to our students as well, so to full time university students. So the more courses that you take, the more funds that we will have to be able to support underrepresented and students who have financial needs to study with us for free.

Matt Bowles: That is so awesome. And I understand that you might even have a special discount offer for Maverick Show listeners that want to take some of these courses. So how do people get that?

Vincie Ho: Yes. So, we've created discount code for the maverick community and the discount code is very easy to remember. It's just **Maverick Community** for 10% off of all the courses and online programs that we offer at [RISE Travel Institute](#).

Matt Bowles: Amazing. We greatly appreciate that. I think that's a great place to conclude this conversation and move into the final part. Vincie, are you ready for *The Lightning Round*?

Vincie Ho: Yes.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it.

Vincie Ho: Let's do it.

Matt Bowles: All right, what is one book that has significantly influenced you over the years you'd most recommend people check out?

Vincie Ho: There's one book that I really like that I read when I was volunteering in Africa. It's called [A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah](#) and he's an ex-child soldier now living in New York City. It's amazing book.

Matt Bowles: Wow. We will link that up in [the show notes](#) so folks can check it out. All right, who is one person currently alive today that you've never met that you'd most love to have dinner with? Just you and that person for a dinner and conversation?

Vincie Ho: I hesitate between Michelle Obama and Dr. Jane Goodall.

Matt Bowles: Ooh. All right, well we'll give you two then. You can have two dinners. I think you deserve to have dinner with both of them Vincie in my opinion.

Vincie Ho: Together. That would be so great.

Matt Bowles: Oh yeah, three-person dinner. That's amazing. All right, knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Vincie?

Vincie Ho: I'd say be curious and get out of your comfort zone and really understand that just being kind is not enough. You need to understand the underlying causes of all the oppressive systems and really find a way to act in such a way that you are actually addressing the root causes of things and not just always putting band aids on bleeding ones.

Matt Bowles: That is awesome advice. All right, of all of the places you have traveled to, what are your top three favorite destinations that you'd most recommend people check out.

Vincie Ho: Well, this is so hard. I love everywhere that I went to. But of course, I have a special thing for France for sure. And then I love Morocco. It's such a colorful country and, you know, it's so culturally diverse as well. From one region to another, the landscape changes, food changes everything. I just really love Morocco and Myanmar.

Matt Bowles: Nice.

Vincie Ho: Very beautiful.

Matt Bowles: Those are really good picks. All right, what are your top three bucket list destinations, places you've never been highest on your list you most want to see.

Vincie Ho: Iran, Ghana. And there are so many. I cannot pick Seychelles.

Matt Bowles: Nice. Yeah. I just went to Ghana for the first time in 2019. I was in Accra for a month and it was just magical.

Vincie Ho: I cannot wait to go. I have a very close connection. I have a very good friend of mine who is teaching at the University of Kumasi. I've been telling him in the past 10 years that I would go the next year and it still hasn't happened. So, I am going next year, 2022, if it is safe to travel there.

Matt Bowles: I love that.

Vincie Ho: For the community there.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. Awesome. Vincie, this was so wonderful to have you on the show. I want you to let folks know how they came, can find you, maybe follow you on social media, make sure they're fully connected with RISE and all the ways that they should be and check out your content. How do you want people to come into your world?

Vincie Ho: Thank you so much for having me on this show. I really enjoyed the conversation. So, everything is on our website, rise.travelinstitute.org and our [Instagram](#) handle is *risetravelinstitute*. You can find us on [LinkedIn](#). It's also *RISE Travel Institute*, so get in touch with us.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. We are going to link all that up in [the show notes](#) so folks can just go to one place at themaverickshow.com there you're going to find links to everything that Vincie and I have discussed today. How you can check out all the amazing things that she's doing at RISE and how you can get your special discount. All that is going to be in one place at themaverickshow.com Vincie, this was so amazing. Thank you for coming on the show.

Vincie Ho: Thank you so much for having me.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.