

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Nora Yusuf. She is a location independent content creator who explores the world and captures its natural beauty through photography, videography and time lapse. Originally from Malaysia, she co-organizes photography workshops and tours around the world and has now been to over 80 countries. Nora has visited some of the world's most remote and stunningly beautiful landscapes and her mission is to encourage interest in travel, adventure and nature as well as to inspire women and break down stereotypes.

Nora, welcome to the show.

Nora Yusuf: Thank you. Pleasure being here.

Matt Bowles: I'm so excited to have you here. Your photography and videography are some of the best that I have seen anywhere in the travel space and has been so inspiring to me, especially because you have been to so many places that I have not yet been. So, I'm super, super stoked for this conversation. But let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are doing this interview from today. We're not in person, unfortunately. I am actually in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador in Central America. And we are about 14 hours' time difference apart. Where are you today?

Nora Yusuf: I'm in Malaysia, south of the capital, Kuala Lumpur, at home with my cats.

Matt Bowles: I love that Malaysia is one of my favorite countries. I have spent about four months in Kuala Lumpur. Definitely some of the best food on the planet of Earth. I suppose that's one of the challenging parts about being a traveler from Malaysia, right. Like anywhere you go, the food is probably not going to be quite as good as it is at home, right?

Nora Yusuf: Of course. And you always miss home cooked foods like Malaysian food when you're traveling.

Matt Bowles: Well, let's start off with that. Can you share a little bit about your Background, where you grew up and as you were growing up, how did your interest in travel develop as a kid?

Nora Yusuf: I moved around a bit, but mostly in Malaysia, lived with my grandparents, growing up in my mom's hometown. So, I spent some time in the Peninsular Malaysia and as well in Borneo, the Sarawak side, where my dad is from. So, you're from both sides and sometimes not from either. Because when you're in that side, they say you're, oh, you're not from here, you're from the other side. And when you're back there, like, oh, you're an outsider, you're from the other side. So, it's a bit weird being always different from the other kids. But I always love to read picture books, the map, look at all these different pictures of landscapes and different places and see how people live and how they dress. Just me being curious. I started, okay, I want to go and travel to all the countries in the world. That was my dream when I was a kid. Of course, that changed as I grew up because these days, if I fall in love with place, I'll go back and do it over and over again until I've covered everything I wanted to cover.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. And when was your first time leaving the country, going out of Malaysia? Can you talk a little bit about how that actually started? Because you had some international experience experiences when you were growing up, right?

Nora Yusuf: Yeah, I accompanied my parents when they were studying their academicians. So, I can't really remember Canada because I was so young back then. But I remember being in East Lansing, Michigan, in middle school. Of course, I was different than the other kids, but I don't think I faced that much

hostility back then. And because kids being kids and then more easily than these days, these days I stand out like a sore thumb in most places.

Matt Bowles: What was that like for you at that age, though? So, it was middle school age. You were in the United States and then how long were you there for? And what was that experience like for you when you think back on it? What kind of an impact did that have?

Nora Yusuf: It was like around plus months, I think. It wasn't that long. But it was really a game changer for me because I got to see how different school kids were, don't have to wear uniforms to school and all the different places my parents took me when. And we just traveled around the U.S. quite a bit when we were there as well, the landscape and all the different seasons. So, because Malaysia, we have the tropical season and you don't get to see all the leaves changing or the snow and stuff like that. So, I think that was one thing that I really enjoyed when I was there.

Matt Bowles: Nice. And then I know that you studied abroad as well, right. And got to spend some time in the UK and traveling around Europe. Can you talk a little bit about that part of your life and how was that experience for you?

Nora Yusuf: So, I was lucky. I got a scholarship to do engineering in the UK, which is where everything started. So, while studying, we always read up about all these different places around the UK and we were planning to go. So, we worked part time cleaning or whatever. We could get tomato picking, fruit picking. Yeah, during the weekends, during the holidays we managed that. And then that graduated to, okay, we've done the UK, we want to do Europe. And the ultimate trip was to do like a backpacking trip all around Europe, like interailing. And we did that for one month and we bought all the pass for all the zones and we did that. And that really got us hooked on travel afterwards. It was a real adventure.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I relate to that so much because my study abroad experience was in Ireland, so right near there. And I lived there for a year. And then the same thing, right? Like on the weekends we were traveling and going different places around Ireland. And then my roommate and I got the Euro rail pass. It was like a hop on, hop off, go to like 17 countries or whatever it was at the time. And we just took it for a month over the winter break. And that is just invigorating, right? It was like my first real international traveling backpacking experience. And it just lights you up and inspires you to travel the world, right?

Nora Yusuf: Yep. That was the start.

Matt Bowles: And then I also want to hear about from there, what was next for you, because I know that you then started working and you spent time in the Middle East. Can you take us a little bit on sort of that professional trajectory and what it was like where you were in the Middle east and what that experience was like for you.

Nora Yusuf: So, I joined the oil and gas industry when I got back, first posting was in Indonesia and then Malaysia and then to the Middle East. Never been there before. It was quite a shock to see different people and how they dress the desert. I love the desert. And we worked mostly in the desert without anyone there and just us and the rig. I enjoyed my time there. And we had also the opportunity to travel within the regions around. So, I did Jordan, which is still one of my favorite trips. And I go back just like that in a heartbeat. Take two years back. I did Oman, went back there, covered a lot of more interesting places aside from all the rigs and those yucky places I don't want to go back to and cover places that I really wanted to see but didn't manage to see last time. All the fort, some oasis and some desert as well. That was really nice.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome. Well, I want to get into talking about a number of your travel experiences because you have been to some incredible places. But first of all, I want to start off talking about Malaysia because you have traveled really extensively around your home country, spent time in a number of different places, and I want to just give love to your home country and allow you to sort of talk about it a little bit. Especially for people that have never been to Malaysia. Can you talk a little bit about its amazingness and maybe some different places around Malaysia and some of the stuff that you love most and maybe that if people wanted to visit Malaysia, they should definitely be sure to check out.

Nora Yusuf: Okay. Malaysia is not a big country, but I like to say that it has a huge diverse offering to cater for like different crowds. So, if you like cities. Kuala Lumpur kl that's where you were last time, right?

Matt Bowles: Yes.

Nora Yusuf: That has almost everything a city can offer me. I'm not much of a city person, so I'll talk more about what I like and what I would recommend people to see in nature. So, Malaysia, we have lots of, well, some amazing national parks, nature reserves. So not sure if you've heard the Mulu Cays.

Matt Bowles: I have. I've heard of it. I haven't been there.

Nora Yusuf: You should go. I mean, it's a good adventure. You can take like a long boat to visit these limestone caves, the pinnacles you can track up. And it's all in the middle of a beautiful rainforest setting. And it's quite accessible compared to other caves I guess in the world. And if you're really afraid of roughing it out, there's a Marriott over there. So, there's luxury as well. If you're afraid to rough it out, there's also, if you like scuba diving, there's also a lot of cool dives and the ultimate one being Sipadan, which is one of the places that has the richest marine habitat. It's often associated to Jacques Cousteau. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it right. Sorry.

Matt Bowles: Jacques Cousteau.

Nora Yusuf: Jacques Cousteau. Okay. So, I did my advanced open water over there. It was one of the best locations I've been, so there's that. But if you just want to kick back and relax, there's also some really nice beaches and islands as well, with white sandy beaches and clear waters and stuff like that. Yeah, those are the places.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome. Yeah. Southeast Asia is an incredible place for scuba diving. I actually did my advanced open water certification in Thailand on the island of Ko Pha Ngan. And when I was doing my certification, Nora, we just happened randomly to be so lucky that a whale shark just rolled up and hung out and swum around with us for, like, 10 minutes. It was amazing.

Nora Yusuf: Nice.

Matt Bowles: It was so cool.

Nora Yusuf: You guys are so lucky.

Matt Bowles: I know. It was crazy because, like, in the dive shop, the instructors that go and they dive every day and they have on the wall a board for. For how many whale sharks each of the instructors has ever seen. And they were telling us, like, people come here, they dive every day for months, and they try to see a whale shark in the wild, and they never see one. And so, when we were going out for our dives, they were telling us, like, okay, so this is your itinerary for the day for what we're going to learn and teach you today.

Unless we see a whale shark, in which case all bets are off, and we swim with the whale shark. It just happened that we saw one and it came and hung out, and it was just amazing. It's just like a lottery. And we just got super lucky. It was amazing.

Nora Yusuf: Nice. Yeah, I wish I could. I had that.

Matt Bowles: Really cool. But there's so many other places around South Asia that I've just heard incredible things about and would love to do more diving there, for sure. So let me ask you this as we start to go into some of your travel experiences. You did just mention, and I know this from your travel content, that you're not as much of a city person and you really do prioritize going to some of the world's most remote places and seeing some of this just incredible, raw natural beauty. And that's really what you've become passionate about and inspired about and what you document in your photography and your videography. Can you talk a little bit about that sort of maybe even just how that developed and what that sort of nature and the natural landscape means to you and why you love that so much.

Nora Yusuf: It's just different. It's just so tranquil. It's like nothing you've ever seen before. It's all nature, right? It's like raw beauty. And the good thing is that not many people have been there, so it's not polluted by all these people walking around and turning places into big parking lots. So huge tourist bus can come and park and stuff like that. So, I think that's a bit refreshing for me. I'm also not much of a people person, so I don't really like that many people in places like that.

Matt Bowles: I know you like to commune with animals on your travels and you have some amazing pictures of animals that you have met and connected with in different places around the world, which is really, really cool. So, let's talk a little bit about some of the places that you have gone and traveled to in and experience, because they're just, I mean, incredible. And we're going to link up your travel content in [the show notes](#) because I really want people to go and see some of your videos and your time lapses and your photography, because it is truly spectacular, both the quality of the content itself and the fact that you were able to get to some of these incredibly remote places.

So let me just start off, you said to me when we were talking about the different places that you were. You said, I'm bipolar. And I don't mean the condition bipolar. I mean I have been to both the north and the South Pole. So, I thought that was amazing. So, let's maybe just start off with that, because the opening video on your [YouTube](#) channel that people will see the first time they go there, that is sort of the pinned video is from your trip to Antarctica, where I have not been in your video. If anybody needs to be inspired to go to Antarctica, they should just watch your video on it. So, we'll link that up in [the show notes](#). But can you talk a little bit about that particular trip and what Antarctica was like for you?

Nora Yusuf: Well, I've been planning that trip for a long time and only managed to go to Antarctica on my second attempt. The first attempt we were supposed to fly in and the weather was so bad for six days and the flights couldn't go. On the plus side, we managed to get like a complimentary Falkland Island trip where we saw a lot of different penguins, we wouldn't be able to see in Antarctica itself. So, the second try, we decided not to go with the flying part. So, the cruise all the way out the Beagle Channel from Ushuaia across the Drakes Passage. I was really worried about that part because I've seen videos where rocking and rolling and I do get seasick quite a bit. But, I mean, it was good. And then to the Antarctic Peninsula, where we managed to cross the Antarctic Circle as well. We camped in the snow, so we actually camped. We dug ourselves like a hole in the snow, put on a bevy sack and all the liners and all the sleeping bags. It's like a chore in itself. And then we slept there with the really, really beautiful sunset. That was the highlight

of that whole trip, aside from all the animals. But the next morning, we had to cover the hole again, and most of the snow were already compacted, so we had trouble putting snow back in to cover the holes, which was a bigger chore than digging it, but we did it.

Matt Bowles: Wow, that's so amazing. That's why your videos are so incredible, because the imagery that you capture of what the landscape is like there and even going in on the boat and some underwater footage that you have, I mean, just absolutely incredible. So, we're definitely going to link up all of these places that we're going to talk about. You have video footage of and everything. So, we're going to link it all up in [the show notes](#) so folks can go and actually visually see for themselves what some of these places are like. I also want to ask you, though, about your trip to the Arctic Circle. You have been to Greenland. You have seen the northern lights from Greenland. Can you talk a little bit about that and going to that particular region and what that was like?

Nora Yusuf: I was in Iceland before, solo trip, so I was thinking, okay, that's not remote enough. Try Greenland and see what the landscape is like. So, I joined this trip where we flew in out of Reykjavik into the east part of Greenland. Biggest settlement there is Iltoqqortoormiit, which is formerly known as Scoresbysund and it's one of the most remote settlements on Earth, if I'm not mistaken. So, we covered. We took like a schooner all around there, and we saw lots of icebergs, all these different animals. We met with the people in the Iltoqqortoormiit, and that was really, really out of this world. And we went to shore a couple of nights and like to wait for the aurora, and we managed to see this Aurora dancing for us. That was amazing as well.

Matt Bowles: That's so incredible. Yeah, that's just so amazing. All right. And then in addition to the bipolar trip there, I want to ask you about a number of other places that you have been just absolutely incredible. You have spent time in Central Asia and you've done most of the countries on the Silk Road. You've been to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and a bunch of these places in Central Asia. Can you talk a little bit about that region and what that experience was like for you?

Nora Yusuf: So, for the Silk Road. It took me two. I've done two trips so far. The first one covered Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where we started from Bishkek along the Silk Road to some of the old cities around, crossing into Tajikistan through the Kizil Art Pass. But that's really high, which is in the Pamir Mountains. And then we ended up in Dushanbe. That path is where I think everybody in the trip, and me included, we had ams. It was high. And I wasn't sure what was happening. And we had headaches, thumping headaches and heart palpitations. And we were like, oh, no. It was an adventure. And we all survived. As soon as we came back down to a normal ish elevation, everybody was fine. But the views, the views were out of this world.

Matt Bowles: And then where was your second trip? You said you went two trips to the Silk Road.

Nora Yusuf: So, the second trip was from Pakistan into China through the Karakoram highway, also elevations. I'm not so sure. I can't imagine how hard it was for merchants or traders in large caravans doing these routes. We in the modern days are doing it now, but in those days, I really can't imagine how they did it.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, for sure. That's amazing. Well, you have some really incredible video footage of that as well of some places in Pakistan that were just gorgeous. And I'm planning to go hopefully later this year. I was going to go in 2020 to Pakistan and then Covid happened. So, I've been kind of postponing that trip, but

super high on my list to go to Pakistan. And then of course, I want to do the whole Silk Road and just go like Western China through Central Asia and all of that. So that is like, super high on my bucket list. So, I'm definitely going to consult you for more tips and guidance when I get ready to do that.

Nora Yusuf: No problem.

Matt Bowles: One of the things that I have done that I was also really excited to see in your content is I did take, in 2019, I took the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia through Siberia, and we went out to Lake Baikal. Now we did it in the summer ish time, right? Kind of summer, fall, where it was T shirts, warm weather, that kind of stuff. You have been out to Lake Baikal in the winter, and your video footage is just stunning. It's amazing. But can you share a little bit about what that was like for you? Because you didn't you do like a photo workshop thing out there in Lake Baikal? Can you talk a little bit about. Well, I Guess maybe the context of that, right? Like, what that experience was. Like, the photo workshop. And then what is Lake Baikal like for people that have never been so.

Nora Yusuf: Lake Baikal in winter, it's a huge lake, right?

Matt Bowles: I heard it's the biggest lake in the world. It's the deepest, it's the oldest. It's got, like, this massive percentage of, like, all the freshwater in the world. Like some huge percentage, like 20% or something, is like, in this one lake in the middle of Siberia. The scale of it is crazy.

Nora Yusuf: Yeah. So, and then imagine in winter, the whole surface is frozen. It's thick enough that cars can drive on. It can bear the weight of vehicles. So, we went there in winter and we had these Russian combis and we, like, drove around looking for spots that were really nice. We had ice shards protruding out from the lake. We had these ice grottos where you have icicles hanging down from the caves, which made, like, a beautiful frame to your picture. We just drove around and hunted for all these different beautiful photography sites while we were there and took a lot of pictures. So that was really nice. And we stayed on the island in the middle there, Orkhon Island. We managed to visit some of the Buryat tribes that were local to there as well. That was a quite good trip.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. Well, my Trans-Siberian trip went through there and then ended up we went down on the trans Mongolian route and we ended up in Ulaanbaatar and then did kind of like a camel safari through the Gobi Desert and got to see some of the amazing landscape of the Gobi Desert. But you have done a whole bunch more stuff in Mongolia, including meeting with the eagle hunters and all that kind of stuff, which is incredible. Can you share a little bit? Just for people that have never heard of this, just explain sort of the context for what this was, and then what was the experience like?

Nora Yusuf: So, in Mongolia, you have the people that I think they descend from, they're actually Kazakhstan and they live in Mongolia, and it's usually the men, so they use eagles to hunt in winter for food for them. So, I didn't go during the eagle festival, though, because there's so many people around that time. It's full of tourists and too many people to take pictures and stuff. So, what we did was we went and lived with one of the families that were the eagle hunters over there. And the difference was that instead of having a male eagle hunter, it was an eagle huntress instead. And they were showing us their way of life. They were herding yaks and sheep and we live with them in these yurts. It was really interesting. And they showed us how they would hunt. And the uncles are real eagle hunters and they were training the younger girl to be an eagle huntress. And that was really amazing. It was really good.

Matt Bowles: That's so amazing. Well, you have also been involved in a number of these 4x4 expeditions in different places around the world. And I want to ask if you can talk about some of those. And maybe let's start with, with South America and your experience there. Maybe just explain a little bit about the context for these 4x4 expeditions that you've been on. And then maybe start with the Trans Andes one because did you have your birthday on one of those events or something like that?

Nora Yusuf: Yes. I met the organizer of these 4x4 expeditions. He's a Malaysian, so I met him on one of the trips and then we were talking about all the expeditions and he was doing. So, I said, oh, I really want to come and join these trips, but I can't really afford it. And he said, yeah, you can come and be our cook. I don't think I can cook. Everybody's going to have food poisoning and not have enough nutrition along this trip. And he said, oh yeah, but you're good at photography and stuff. You can join us as the official photographer. I'm like, yeah, I can do that. Nobody's going to die of food or anything. So, I joined them. So, it was three trips, three subsequent trips, Trans Andes is the second one. So, we shipped, I think around 10 cars from Malaysia over there. It was eight weeks. We covered Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina, going around in the 4x4 all around the country. So, I turned 40 while on that trip. And we were traveling down the Route 40, the Ruta 40, and everybody was giving me like they bought me a nice cake and I took a picture with this for the Ruta 40 signboard. And me being 14, I think that was the best birthday ever so far.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. That's so awesome. Well, you have also in South America, haven't you spent time in the Amazon? I want to hear about this because I've spent a number of months in South America, but I've never done the Amazon. Can you talk about what that was like?

Nora Yusuf: Yeah, that was covered in the Trans Amazon adventure we did, but to be fair. Okay, let's start from the beginning. You can't talk about the Amazon, which is the world's largest rainforest, without talking about the Pantanal, which is the largest tropical wetland in the world. So, during the Trans Amazon trip, we covered both. And it was one of the toughest trips I have ever been on. For Pantanal, we took a pontoon, which is a cattle barge. We loaded all the vehicles there, pitched our tents, pitch our hammocks on there, set up the kitchen, and we traveled along the Rio Paraguay River and Rio Sao Lourenco. And it took us four days, three nights to reach the other destination. It was really hot when the sun was out because the Capitol barge has this metal bottom. And there were all these mutant mosquitoes flying around. They were like swarming. And we had to do all these kung fu moves to get them out of our hair and out of us. But they always found a way to come and bite you, even though the hammock. That's why we call them the mutant mosquitoes. But upside that, we fish for piranhas. And that was my first time eating a piranha, which was surprising really good.

Matt Bowles: Wow, Wait a minute. You fished for piranhas and then you caught the piranhas and then you ate the piranhas?

Nora Yusuf: Yeah, we barbecued them and we cooked them. And the pontoon crew also ate with us. And they also helped us with the fishing. And they gave us some fish to cook as well, Malaysian style, because they wanted to try Malaysian style food from our kitchen. So, we barbecued, we cooked them in chili and stuff like that. It was surprisingly good.

Matt Bowles: That is unbelievable. You're doing Malaysian style cooking of piranhas with the Malaysian style chilies. That is unbelievable.

Nora Yusuf: Yeah. That was the pandemic. The Amazon was a different adventure for the Amazon itself. Our goal was to do the Camel trophy, like something like the camel trophy, where we went through the BR319, which is considered one of the most epic drives in the world, through all these mud and rainforest. So, we had it all. We had these deep giant holes, mud all the way to our knees in some places, washed out all these rickety wooden bridges along the way. And we spent most of the time getting stuck and winking out. And everybody was covered in mud at least a bit, which was fun, but tiring, but fun. And we camped as well. Two out of four nights we camped there. They had these telecommunication towers and like a fence perimeter around it. So, we camped inside where they had a water well as well. And the fence was good to help keep all these animals out that we didn't want all these wild animals, that it was safer for us. There we saw lots of birds, capibaras, you know, these huge rodent-like animals. And we even saw an anaconda crossing in front of one of our trucks. I didn't see it. I was too late. But some of them saw anaconda crossing. I was lucky I didn't see it. I don't think I could have slept that night if I saw one.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. Well, didn't you also do one of these 4x4 trips in East Africa and go through Tanzania? Was that the same event or was that a different experience?

Nora Yusuf: That was with the same organizers. Okay, that was Trans Africa. So, we went South Africa, Lesotho, back into South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Matt Bowles: Tell me what that was like. What were sort of your highlights from that trip?

Nora Yusuf: Everything. All the animals. All the animals I could see. And I was turning here and turning there and everywhere, like snapping around. And that was amazing. And they also had these nice. These salt pans similar to Paladin, Bolivia. And we actually camped there. And at night I took like a time lapse of the Milky Way above our campsite. And that was one of the best stargazing places I've been to as well.

Matt Bowles: I watched that time lapse video that you did from there with the stars, and it is just absolutely incredible. But that's really cool. Yeah. You mentioned Bolivia and I know that you went through there on the 4x4. For me, when I went to Bolivia, I was so blown away. I had a sense of what to expect. It's like I had seen some pictures. I was going there on purpose to see the landscape, but it was so far beyond anything that I expected. It just blew me away. And I tell people in terms of landscapes that I've seen, I tell people, just go to Bolivia. It's insane. It looks like another planet every single day. You can see landscape that's so diverse and so different from anything else that I have ever seen. It almost feels like you're on a different planet each day as you're going around like Luni. I mean, you have the salt flats, but then you have all of the other parts of the national park there with red colored lagoons and rainbow-colored mountains and just, I mean, all kind of stuff that's like otherworldly. I mean, it blew my mind. Bolivia.

Nora Yusuf: Yeah. And the high desert was really awesome place to see all these landscapes.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, it's completely wild. Well, I want to also Nora ask you for some of your advice and tips on photography and videography and time lapses and all that. And maybe let's just start with sort of your photography. Can you talk a little bit about how you got into photography and then how you cultivated your skills and talent to the level that they are now?

Nora Yusuf: I bought my camera a while back when I was still working, used it now and then just casually when traveling, but mostly taking pictures of me in the background, which is like what all the tourists do. So, once I was not working anymore, I started to pick up photography. I traveled quite a bit and I was like, okay, I'm going to all these nice places with all these amazing landscapes. It's going to be a shame not to

try and capture it in all its glory, in all its beauty and share that with people who haven't been. And my mom keeps asking, oh, where are you going? Where are the pictures? I want to see. And I really want to show people what it's like because, I mean, I can't explain how they look like and it's best to see with pictures and videos and that's the best way to armchair travel with me. So, I tried with my camera, took some online courses, took some classes as well to learn how to take pictures better and what angles and all this good stuff.

Matt Bowles: Can you give some specific tips, maybe techniques, tactics that listeners can use to start taking better pictures? So, we have a lot of digital nomads, a lot of world travelers. Listen to the show. What are some tips that you can suggest so that people can start taking better photos when they go to these amazing places?

Nora Yusuf: Don't be lazy, do your homework. I mean, you know where you're going. And there's the Google universe is amazing and can see all these different pictures on there. So, you can see what places are the good places to take pictures of. And once you're there, move around, try different angles, maybe some unconventional angles, go low, go high, or different stuff that helps to differentiate your pictures and what you've seen as well. And maybe you see something that other people see and just capture it in natural beauty. I don't take lots of pictures of people, so I can't help you much with people pictures, right?

Matt Bowles: Yeah, you're very landscape centric as well as animals. When you are hanging out with animals and it's amazing. We're going to link up your [Instagram](#) in [the show notes](#) and I want to encourage people to just go and check it out and just see the caliber of your photography because it's amazing and it's inspiring. Let's talk about the time lapse technique for people that are not familiar with what a time lapse is. I'm definitely going to link up your [YouTube](#) so that they can go see what you've done with time lapse because it is extraordinary. You will go to some of these incredible places and you will do a time lapse video of just some of the most incredible landscapes. And it is amazing to see. But can you just explain what is a time lapse for people that are not familiar with that and how do you make them? Like, if people wanted to start using that technique, how do you make such incredible time lapse videos?

Nora Yusuf: So, time lapse is just like a normal video, but fast forward. But the difference is you take pictures every couple of seconds and then every interval that, like a fixed interval, you take a picture and then you edit it and you combine it all together to make into a video. And the duration depends on how fast the scene is changing. So like clouds moving or the aurora dancing. The first time I learned time lapse is in Greenland when I was watching that aurora and I was like, how can I capture this? I tried it with video and it didn't work very well. So, I got the tip to try and do it with time lapse. And because when you take a picture, you're allowed to open your shutter much longer so you can actually take in lighter and actually get that scene. And when you put all these pictures together, that makes a time lapse video that has all the colors, all the things you want in that picture and it's moving. It's a dynamic thing, right?

Matt Bowles: Yeah, it's amazing. And you have now done this in all of these extraordinary places and sunsets and sunrises and clouds moving over mountains and things happening. And then it's just all condensed, right? So, it's like a fast forwarded many hours condensed into a minute or two video. And it's just absolutely incredible. So, we will link that up for folks that want to check that out. And then this is something that is now a feature, right? You can just use an iPhone or something like that. It just has a time lapse thing to create one, right? Anybody can do it.

Nora Yusuf: Anybody can do it. I mean, it's preprogrammed into some of the cameras, into some of your phones. So, you just can do it even like a hyper lapse as well. So, for me, why I do time lapses, I just want to put the camera on a tripod, let it take pictures, and I want to sit and soak in all the beauty of these places without bothering to take pictures. Like trying to snap pictures here and there. I just want to sit down soaking everything while the camera does its job on its. And it can watch it later on.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome. I really like that. I mean, I think it's an amazing thing, right? Because one of the questions that I always ask when I have content creators on, and sometimes I'll interview professional video makers who kind of video most of the things that they're experiencing in their travels or their lives. And I asked them about that, you know, how do you sell separate yourself and sort of being in the moment and actually experiencing it with documenting every single thing that you're doing and all that. So, I love that tip. Your answer is, I just put my camera on a tripod and I let it film for hours on its own.

Nora Yusuf: Do its thing. Yeah.

Matt Bowles: And then I just live in the moment. And then later on I'll go back and see what the camera got and I'll put it into a time lapse.

Nora Yusuf: Yeah. And fingers crossed that it works, right?

Matt Bowles: Well, it's definitely worked a number of times for you, that's for sure. Because your videos are amazing. And then you'll put some music behind them and it'll just be really, really an incredible piece. So that's really awesome. Let me ask you this, Nora. At this point in your life, when you think back over all of the travel that you've done and all of the places that you've been, how has all of that impact impacted you over the years?

Nora Yusuf: Once you're out there, once you see how vast the world is, how much bigger the world is, it humbles you, right. And then makes you appreciate what you have, what you've been privy to. There is much more than the small corner you occupy in this world. I mean, a plus side is you get to see what other people are doing, how they live, what the rules are for different countries and stuff like that. But yeah, I mean, there's so much to explore out there, so much to see.

Matt Bowles: One of your missions is to inspire women to travel and also to break down stereotypes. Can you talk a little bit about that? And can you also share maybe any tips that you have for female travelers and maybe Muslim women travelers in particular?

Nora Yusuf: So, when I started traveling, when I was backpacking around Europe, I didn't see any people like me or my best friend. There was nobody like us. You do see female travelers, female backpackers traveling, but with their boyfriends, with their husbands. I mean, don't take me wrong. Nothing wrong with that. But you don't really see women traveling solo at that time or even in groups. But I do see that changing slowly these days. You see more women travelers out there, but even online, the majority of the travel content is still male or geared towards males at least. So, for me, I just want to show that it's possible to travel even to these remote places, go on these adventures as a woman, as a female. Before the pandemic, I managed to conduct an all-woman photography class for a group that was going to Norway. They wanted tips how to photograph the Aurora borealis, the northern light. And yeah, we went through all the different pictures, what options were there and stuff like that. And I love talking about Aurora Borealis because it's still one of the best natural phenomena I've experienced. I still need to see Aurora Australis, the southern thing, but I have not managed yet. It's in my list, my long list.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome. All right, Nora, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into *The Lightning Round*. I know you just mentioned you are so inspired to continue, continue traveling and seeing more places and all of that. So, at this point, right, you've been to 80 countries already. Why do you continue to travel? What does travel mean to you today?

Nora Yusuf: I mean, the world is so big, so there's so many things I haven't seen, so many things I haven't experienced yet. I want to try everything at least once, as long as it's legal or halal, you know.

Matt Bowles: Yeah.

Nora Yusuf: But to me, travel is a privilege. And especially after these days, after this pandemic and having been stuck at home for two plus years, it's a privilege to be out there, to be able to do that. And I just want to continue doing that need to go out there and see things and share it at least with my mom who wants to see all my pictures when I come home.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. I love that. And that is a great place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Nora, are you ready to move in to *The Lightning Round*?

Nora Yusuf: I think so.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right. What is one book that has significantly impacted you over the years you would most recommend people check out?

Nora Yusuf: One of the books that got me hooked on photography and traveling. So, I don't look at books unless it has more pictures in it. So that's my type of book. So, the book is [Edge of the Earth, Corner of the Sky by Art Wolfe](#). So, his photos of the world, photos of these different remote places, and his Vision actually inspired me to continue travel and to do the photography trip.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. All right, you have now been to over 80 countries, Nora. That's a lot of traveling. I want to ask if you can share one travel hack that you use.

Nora Yusuf: Depending on the travel you're doing, if you have the skill, it doesn't hurt to ask if you can join as a crew or a helper in return for discounts or free excursions. Even a free trip. That's how I got my gig for the 4x4 expedition. Another one, if you have a flexible schedule, last minute deals do offer significant number of discounts. I was in Ushuaia after the Antarctica trip, so I was wondering, wandering around the town, looking at all the different offers, it was really good. I mean, there were these last-minute bargains for these Antarctic, Falkland, South Georgia trips. I nearly booked a trip to go off the next day. Nearly but I didn't and now I regret.

Matt Bowles: Those are two really good travel hacks. Awesome. All right, Nora, if you could have dinner with any one person that's currently alive today who you've never met, just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation, who would you choose?

Nora Yusuf: Well, if it's one of those famous people, I might not be able to eat because I'll be so starstruck, you know, not even talk. Like I get nervous. But I think the person would be Jane Goodall. She loves all these animals and I like animals as well. And she's been to all these places in the jungles over there, so I really want to go there to see experience what she experienced as well.

Matt Bowles: Amazing.

Nora Yusuf: It would be nice to pick her brain.

Matt Bowles: That would be an awesome dinner. All right, Nora, of all the places that you have been, what are your top three favorite travel destinations you'd most recommend? Other people should definitely check out.

Nora Yusuf: I grew up watching Indiana Jones movie, so Petra in Jordan has always been my number one. So that scene where they walk up to the treasury, Jordan, Petra is always going to be number one for me. Antarctica comes a close second and anywhere I can see Aurora Borealis would be number three.

Matt Bowles: Wow, that's awesome. All right, I know you have a super long and amazing inspiring bucket list, but I want to ask you for your top three bucket list destinations you've never been you most want to go.

Nora Yusuf: So South Georgia, where I want to see the king penguins and the elephant seals because I didn't manage to go their last time in South Georgia. Number two, Ethiopia, where Danakil Depression is one of the lowest places on the Planet to the Erta Ali volcano and the Dallol sulfur springs there. They say it's comparable to what you saw in Bolivia with all these sulfur salt desert places. And number three is Socotra Island where you can see the. The dragon's blood tree.

Matt Bowles: Yes. The Socotra Island which is actually part of Yemen. Can you share a little bit about that? Because they have some really unique foliage there. Right. That is only on that one island and no other place on the planet. Is that right?

Nora Yusuf: Yeah, that's the dragon's blood tree. It looks like. I mean, to me, I can't really explain. It's like out of this world. It's like a dry area. And then you said you have all these weird looking trees, like an upside-down umbrella. Ish thing. I don't know. I don't know how to explain it, but that's why I really want to see it. I can explain better.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. Well, we are going to link up in [the show notes](#), we're going to list out all of your bucket list places. So, we'll spell the name and people can do a Google image search to see what it looks like there because it is quite extraordinary. And that is definitely on my bucket list as well. All right, Nora, I want you to let folks know how they can find you, follow you on social media, check out your amazing travel content, your time lapses, your photos, your videos. How do you want people to come into your world?

Nora Yusuf: Well, I haven't been active for the past couple of years because of the COVID but my [Instagram](#) is *nora.yusuf* and my [YouTube](#) is *Nora Yusuf*. So yeah, I'll update it once I've been to more places and have more content. But yeah, yeah, you can follow me there and see all the past pictures and past videos.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, your travel content is insane. It is some of the best that I have seen. And you have been to some of the most extraordinarily beautiful places on the planet because you seek them out and you go there and then you document them in incredible ways. So, we're going to link up your [Instagram](#), we're going to link up your [YouTube](#) and I really want to encourage people to take a look at what you've been up to. And even though you haven't been traveling in the last couple years, can you share a little bit about the astronaut project that you were doing? Because that was so amazing.

Nora Yusuf: So, 2020, because of the pandemic and all the canceled travel plans, I was bored at home. So, I had this idea, I had two astronaut figurines. So, I was thinking, okay, let me recreate all the different

places I have been or I want to go with depicting the astronauts as me, whoever was traveling with me. And we'd visit all these places with these astronaut suits so we wouldn't get Covid. And I built all these backgrounds that looked like the places so the astronaut would go traveling on behalf of me. So, it's also in my [Instagram](#). So, I have in KL, of course with the twin Towers, some aurora borealis, some with the penguins and some with the polar bears and in Iceland. Yeah, that was fun to do. Some dinosaurs as well were involved in it.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, you got really creative. That was hilarious and really fun to go through and see. So, we are going to link all of that up in [the show notes](#). Folks can just go to one place and [themaverickshow.com](#) just go to [the show notes](#) for this episode and there we're going to link up everything that we have discussed in this episode, especially how you can check out Nora's amazing travel content. I guarantee you will be inspired to travel to a number of the places she has been because it is incredible. Nora, this was awesome. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Nora Yusuf: Thank you for having me.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.