

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Cara Laban. She is a digital nomad who has spent the last decade living and working across Asia, Europe, South America and Australia. She is a systems thinker and professional problem solver who helps ambitious people design lives and businesses that work for their brains. She is also the founder of [Travel Reddi](#), an AI powered travel guide platform simplifying global travel logistics. And she is the author of the forthcoming book *How to Do Anything Even If You're Lazy*, a practical framework for building momentum without relying on motivation or hustle. Born and raised on Long Island in the New York City metro area, her worldview is informed by her experience as a queer Jewish woman who questions power, power structures and believes you can honor your roots without inheriting everything that comes with them.

Cara, welcome to the show.

Cara Laban: Thank you so much for having me Matt and I sound so impressive hearing all of that read out loud.

Matt Bowles: You and I have hung out in multiple places around the world. I've been following your work for quite a while and I have been so inspired and impressed and appreciative of you and everything that you've been up to. So, I'm really excited, excited to have you here today. But let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from today, I am actually in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, today. And where are you?

Cara Laban: I am in Guanajuato, Mexico. I'm normally based in New York, but not this week or next week.

Matt Bowles: Tell me a little bit about Guanajuato because I love Mexico. I have been many times to many different places, but I have not yet been there. There for me and other listeners that have not been. What is Guanajuato like?

Cara Laban: It is a very old city. It is beautiful. It's super colorful. It's in the mountains and they have a wet and dry season. We're in dry season right now. So, when you go on a hike, it's more arid, dessert. But in wet season, it's very green and lush. So, it's interesting to see those two differences. It's also a student city, so it's very young. But at the same time, there's a lot of retirees from the States here. So, you kind of have young and old, which is nice.

Matt Bowles: Well, I definitely have to get down there to visit. I've had a few invites and I have not yet made it. So, I'm super excited to swing through at some point. I feel like the New York City thing would be a great place to start. You and I recently hung out in New York City. We were at the [WITS Travel Creator Summit](#). And then you came to my birthday party in New York. We went to a Nigerian restaurant and had such an amazing time. But you're actually from Long Island. You've lived in New York City and you have a much deeper connection than I do to New York, even though I dearly, dearly love New York. And I'm curious for you at this point in your life, having traveled as much as you have around the world, when you think about New York City today, what makes New York City so unique and special globally speaking? And for you, how would you describe what you love about New York City?

Cara Laban: I think the diversity of both the people, the food, the things available to do. You don't find it in any other city. As somebody who's gone to cities where people are like, oh, it's really similar to New York. I get there and I'm like, I could see why you would think that, but it's not. It's missing something. And that's ultimately why I moved back a year and a half ago, because I was missing the something of it, you know?

Matt Bowles: I totally know. And I am actually the only member of my family that has never lived in New York City. So, my dad is from New York City originally. My mom is from Binghamton, New York. My parents have moved back subsequently and lived in New York. Both of my sisters have each lived in New York City. I'm actually the only member that's never lived there. But it is my very favorite city in the world. And I try to go through at least once a year just because I feel like the energy of New York is found nowhere else on the planet. And I just need to infuse my soul with it a minimum of once a year and then go back out into the world. But I would love to hear a little bit about your background and what it was like growing up in the Jewish community on Long Island.

Cara Laban: Long Island is an interesting place. If for any listeners who don't know where Long Island is located, it is actually directly attached to Queens and Brooklyn and a bridge away from Manhattan or a tunnel away from Manhattan, depending on how you go. So, I grew up about an hour drive right bang in the middle of Long Island. Long island is also where the Hamptons are, but way out east. So, you have a real mix of blue collar and white-collar people on Long Island. There is a very large Jewish population. So, the school that I grew up going to, we actually had five towns within our one school.

So, we had a lot of Jewish kids, a lot of, like popular Jewish kids, and we had a lot of Italian kids. We had black, Hispanic, Asian populations throughout the school. And as I'm older now, I realize how segregated it was at the school. The Jewish kids were friends with the Jewish kids, the black kids were friends with the black kids, the Italian kids were friends with the Italian kids. I mean, everyone was friends with each other and in the classes, but the groups, you really kind of notice a difference looking back on it now. So, growing up, I never really thought much of being Jewish because it was the norm where I was. I didn't realize that Jews were the minority in the world because it wasn't the case how I grew up.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about the role of theater in your life, how old you were when you got into that and the role it played as you came up?

Cara Laban: Yeah, I started theater extremely young. I think I was in preschool. My best friend and I just loved performing. So, our parents put us in this school like a summer camp where we would practice songs and then we would go to a nursing home every other week to perform for them. And that kind of developed my love for theater and acts of community service, because I grew up doing both of those things. So, I continued doing theater most of my life. I did it all throughout high school. I ended up transferring schools in college because I went for engineering and realized I missed theater so much. So, I transferred to another school to not pursue theater, but to give myself space to act.

So, I became the president of my theater club, which also meant I was the producer of the shows there. And it was fun, but also very stressful because I was playing lead roles. I often played old ladies. I'm a character actress. I'm never the leading lady type. So, I was playing some lead roles while also maintaining my straight A average as a psych student while doing a bunch of other things, which was pretty cool. I look back at that now, and I'm really impressed that I was able to juggle all of those things. And then when I decided to move into the city and pursue acting, as most actors do, I became a waitress. So, my time spent on acting, I was going to acting class and a couple of auditions here and there, but mostly I was waitressing, unfortunately.

Matt Bowles: Can you describe the life you were living at that time as you were trying to balance and juggle all of that, as so many aspiring actors do, and then talk about the transitional moment, the day that you decided that you wanted to move abroad and leave the United States?

Cara Laban: So, like I said, my dream was to be an actress. And as many actors do, they become waitresses. Because it's a flexible job. You can find people to cover your shifts. And a lot of us working. I worked at this German beer hall. A lot of us working there were actors or in the arts, so we would cover each other's shifts if auditions came up. But I was working a lot because I had to pay off my student loans. I had an injury at a job previously, so I had to take a lot of time off. And for multiple reasons, I was in debt. So, I was picking up a lot of extra shifts at this job. And there was one day, I remember I had my first day off in nine days. I was unfortunately a very good waitress. And also fortunately, because in New York, the tips are great. But I was called in to work a lot of closing shifts and opening shifts where I was the only one on.

So, one day, I finally had my day off after nine days of working. And I remember I went to my sketch writing class, and then I planned to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge, get some ice cream, chill in the park. And on my way out of class, my manager texted me, and she said, can you close tonight? Christina's dad had a heart attack. And I was like, well, fuck. I was like, there's nobody else who can close. I've worked nine days in a row. She was like, no, the only other person we trust to close is out of town. Can you please, please, please come in? So, the people pleaser and me said, yes, I'll close. So, I went home. I took my uniform out of the dirty laundry. It had pit stains on it. I remember because we only got one of those little white shirts you wear under your dirndl. And. And I had to take it out of the laundry. And I took the train back into Manhattan.

And as I was waiting on the train platform, it was in Queens. So, it's outside to just like, give you the whole picture. So, I'm standing at the train platform, Train is coming. And I was like, you know what? I don't have to go into work. I'm so miserable. I'm not even following my dreams. I don't even know what I'm doing here anymore. I could jump. I could jump. And then the people pleaser in me said, no, I'm going to make a lot of people late to work if I do that. So instead, I got on the train and I remembered I actually always wanted to move to Australia. And it just hit me in that moment, okay, maybe I don't want to die, but I don't want to live here. So I googled how to move to Australia, and I found out about the working holiday visa, which I didn't know about previously. And then six months later, I moved to Australia.

Matt Bowles: How did you decide on Australia? What was it that had put that in your mind as a place that you wanted to go? And then when you decided to make that move, where did you end up landing in Australia and what was your first impression?

Cara Laban: So, my aunt had studied abroad in Australia when she was a teenager, and she always told us about her time in Australia. And I was like, that sounds so cool. I want to do that since I was really little. And then I thought I would do it in high school, like, she did it. And I found out you had to do an extra year of high school or summer class to make up all the requirements. And I was like, there is no way I'm going to do that. And then I thought, I'll study abroad in college and go to Australia. But then I transferred schools three times. I changed my major four times, and it was just a mess and it was just not going to happen.

And then my ex at the time was incredibly scared of spiders because I had asked if we could go to Australia. He was a true fear of spiders. And he was like, I'm never stepping foot in Australia. And then I just forgot that I wanted to go at that point. So that one day I just like, oh, yeah, I forgot about this dream of mine to go to Australia. So that's where it came from. And when I got there, I initially flew into Sydney and planned a five-week trip up the east coast of Australia. And when I landed Sydney, I was like, did I just make the biggest mistake of my life? Sydney is exactly like New York, except there's beaches here. And I was like, did I just fly all the way across the world, spend all of this money, leave all of my friends and family behind to be somewhere exactly like New York? So that was my first impression. But then up the

coast, it was much different. It's really beautiful. And then I landed in Melbourne, which is also not too dissimilar from Brooklyn, but different enough that that's where I stayed for a while.

Matt Bowles: So, the only place in Australia that I have ever been in Melbourne. And I was so enamored with it, probably for the reasons that you're describing in terms of the similarities to Brooklyn, there was so much about it that really won my heart. But for people that have not been there, I know you did end up living there certainly a lot longer than I stayed there. So, what did you end up really appreciating about Melbourne and what is it like? How would you describe it for people that have never been?

Cara Laban: Yeah, well, as you know, the rivalry is between the north part of Melbourne and the south part of Melbourne. The north part is way more grungy, artsy city life, but it's more spread out than like Brooklyn. It's not super high buildings. And then you have the CBD, which is a central business district. And then you go to the south side of the CBD, which is where the beaches are. So, it's beautiful, but that's what it is. It's more of the beachy type of person, more hippie, but not in the same way as the north side is, and then also a little more yuppie the further south you go.

Matt Bowles: Now, you also lived in Brisbane for a period. I have never been there. What is Brisbane like? How is it different from Melbourne?

Cara Laban: Brisbane is a much smaller city than Melbourne. It's also on the water. It is a beautiful city, but it's interesting. It's a city place without city folk, if you know what I mean. So, it was an interesting, much slower pace of life, less things to do. But interestingly, it's where I started learning how to salsa and bachata.

Matt Bowles: That is very interesting. What was the salsa and bachata scene like?

Cara Laban: It was huge. I mean, I signed up for a class there that I was going three times a week to classes. And then they had social dancing at different bars on the weekends or during the week. I was doing it a lot. And then now that I've been traveling more and I dance, they're like, where'd you learn how to dance, Dominican Republic? And I'm like, no, Brisbane, Australia. And people are like, that's so random.

Matt Bowles: Well, speaking of getting away from the bigger cities, you also lived in the Australian outback for four months. Can you talk about that experience?

Cara Laban: Yeah. So that was totally different to anywhere else I lived in Australia. And the reason I lived there was because with the working holiday visa, if you want to earn a second year and now a third year, they've changed the rules for Americans and other people on the subtype 462 visa, you have to work north of the Tropic of Capricorn. So, I was allowed to work in hospitality, whereas British people and other people on the 417-visa had to work in agriculture, like farming or something like that. So, I didn't have to do farming, but I had to work north of the Tropic of Capricorn. So, I went to Darwin. Initially, I did a road trip up the center of Australia and landed in Darwin. I was like, I'm going to get a bar job here. There are tons of bars, lots of nightlife in Darwin. But I really struggled because all of the other Americans are also going there trying to get a bar job.

And this girl that I met at my hostel in Darwin was like, I'm going to this town called Kununurra because they have farm work. You should come. I was like, well, I don't need to do farm work, so I'm not going to live in Kununurra, wherever that is, which was 10 hours west of Darwin. But I was struggling to find a job. And

she was like, there's a job opening at the bakery. He said, you're hired if you come. So, I was like, fuck it, I'll go. So, I took the bus 10 hours west of Darwin and lived in a 10-bed dorm for four months.

And Kununurra is a town of about a population of 11,000. I would say it fluctuates based on the tourist seasons. So, it's a very small town, dirt roads no street lights, just stop signs and roundabouts. And this was also my first real time living in a place that Aboriginal people were a part of the community. Because you don't really see Aboriginal people in the south, in Melbourne, as part of the culture. So that was interesting to see and how they're not really super integrated into society. It's still kind of segregated and they have rules that make Aboriginal people feel very separate from everyone else. So that was my impression, living there, really.

Matt Bowles: What was your life like there? Because you were there for many months. And what was that story you were telling me, didn't you run out of gas in the middle of nowhere?

Cara Laban: That was actually. The following year I was doing a road trip with some friends on the west coast of Australia, which, by the way, is probably one of the most beautiful places I've ever been in the world. Where I lived in Kununurra as well. The surrounding areas, some of the top-notch nature you've ever seen, but there's also nothing for miles or kilometers and kilometers and as you would say in Australia. So, my friends and I rented. It was like a buyback agreement with this old Toyota Land Cruiser. It was, I believe, a 1994 Toyota Land Cruiser. It was a heavy car. It was a gas guzzler for sure. We were putting 120AUD into that car every other day.

And we had this atlas that had all of the gas stations, or petrol stations as they're called there, and we were stopping. The guy who gave us the car was like, make sure you're really stopping every chance you get. But the car also had an overflow tank, a second gas tank, and we weren't sure if the gauge worked or not because it never went below half and it never went above half either. And we weren't even sure where to fill that tank up. So, one day we had picked up a few stragglers on our journey. So, we had five people on the car, where we were originally three people and we were all backpackers. So, all of our belongings were in the car. So, on our very long stretch one day we were on a bit of a time constraint to bring one of the guys to Brisbane.

So, we were driving from Darwin to Brisbane and we left early in the morning and we're like, oh, we're running a little low on gas, but we've passed the last gas station we filled up there. It was just five hours away. There hasn't been a gas station since. And around five o'clock in the morning, Car stops running, and we're like, it's going to turn up. We have the extra tank. We also didn't have any service where we were. We had no cell service. But we got this walkie talkie when we got the car that you could tune into trucker stations. So, we tuned into the. Because we're like, who else is going to be out now except truckers? We tune into the trucker station, we're like, we are out of gas. We're on this road. Can anybody help us? And the truckers are like, you have diesel? We're like, no. They're like, can't help you. Sorry. And kept going. So, we're like, all right, we're just going to have to sit here until cars come. So, I had some yoga mats. I rolled out some yoga mats. I did some yoga for sunrise. And then this car was coming the same direction we were going. So, we waved them down. It was two girls. They came out. We're like, do you have a jerry can, a gas jug thing? They're like, we do. We're like, yay. Can we buy it from you and fill our car? And they're like, oh, it's empty. We were like, why is it empty?

So, one of the guys we were with hopped in the car with them, drove 10 km to the nearest gas station to fill it up came back We gave them 60 bucks or something for doing that because they had to go super out of

their way to do that. And we were able to make it to the next gas station. And I texted the guy who sold our car. We ran out of gas, and I specifically asked you if we should have jerry cans. And he's like, well, no one has ever run out of gas on that route. And I was like, well, maybe we're more people. I don't know. And I was like, also, why didn't you tell us that the. The gas thing didn't work? And he's like, well, I didn't tell you it did work. I was like, I would have assumed it did. I was fuming. But now we have a good story to tell, so.

Matt Bowles: Well, you have a lot of good travel stories to tell. I also want to hear about your experience traveling to Tasmania, a place I have also not been. What was your experience like couch surfing in Tasmania.

Cara Laban: So, I actually wasn't planning on going to Tasmania when I went to Australia, But I heard people saying great things about it, and I didn't want to go by myself. I wanted to rent a car, and I was running low on Funds. And I met this girl on my east coast trip. And I said, you got any plans after this? And she was like, no. I was like, you want to go to Tasmania with me? She was like, sure. And we were both backpackers, low on funds, so we rented a car we had put the reservation in. And then we're like, for our first night in Hobart, let's couch surf before we get the car. So, we're both applying to stuff on couch surfing. And she was like, oh, somebody accepted me and sends me the profile. And I was like, oh, I saw this profile. I specifically did not apply to it because. Did you read it? It says I don't have a couch. I don't even have a house. And I was like, what could this mean? She was like, let's meet up with him anyway, because he lives here. He's really passionate. Let's see what he has to say.

So, we met up with this guy who is like, I would say he's in his 50s, this bigger man with white long hair, a long, white beard. Maybe Santa Claus could have been Santa Claus. And we met him at a bar in Hobart. And he was like, I recommend you go here, here, here, here. If you want, I could just take you around. I've got nothing to do for two weeks, so I could take you. And me and my friend Hope were like, we'll talk about it and we'll let you know. And then she was like, I think we should do it. Let's cancel the car. She was like, we'll save so much money. And I was like, I guess. When are we ever going to do that again? He was like, you don't have to pay for anything except gas and the campsites for the night.

So, I was like, I don't have any camping gear. None. I have zero camping gear. I don't even have warm clothes. Cause it gets cold in Tasmania at night. And she had like a children's tent, a two-person tent. So, the two of us slept in that tiny little Kmart tent. And he was. I have. I think it was like a Lion King sleeping bag or something. He was like, one of my kids' sleeping bags. You could use that. I was like, sure. So, we did that for about 10 days with this man. And that was an interesting experience for sure.

Matt Bowles: Well, you ended up staying in Australia for two years. Can you share a little bit about the types of jobs that you were doing locally in these different places and how you financed that? Two years in Australia?

Cara Laban: Yeah. So, in Melbourne, when I had initially settled down there, I was looking for a serving job, a bar job, which I thought was going to be pretty easy considering I had extensive experience in New York, but the job market was tough there. But I knew there was a German beer hall that was under the same franchise that I worked at. And I was like, I really, I can't do it. I can't put the dirndl back on. I can't do it. I did it. I did do it. And I worked there on and off for two years. But they had a sister restaurant that was in Docklands, if you know where that is, which is a more business-oriented part of town. And I didn't have to wear the dirndl there, they just had other clothes that I could wear.

So, I worked there for a while. And then, like I said, I worked at a bakery as a barista, which I had no barista experience when I worked there. And Australians are really particular about their coffee, so they would complain every time I was there by myself. So that was fun. In Brisbane, I also worked at a bar, at a brewery. That was cool. And then in Melbourne and Brisbane both, I did so much gig work, I was just hustling, trying to make as much money as I could because I wanted to keep traveling after. So, I was doing promo modeling, I was doing brand ambassador work, I was doing children's entertainment and malls. I was an elf at what is the Home Depot of Australia, Bundy's or something like that. I think that's what it's called. I was a monster on Halloween. I got to scare kids. That was really fun. I was a simulated patient for med students in a hospital that paid like \$50 an hour. That was an awesome job. That was like acting, so that was cool. You get like fixed scenarios.

Matt Bowles: Wow. So nowadays you do the digital nomad thing and you're able to work remotely and travel around. I'm curious, reflecting back on that period of your life, how did that type of cultural immersion from working those local jobs differ from the digital nomad life in terms of your experience when you are in places?

Cara Laban: I definitely have to work a bit harder at making friends now because when you're going into work, you're meeting people all the time. Most of my friends in Australia were either met living in a hostel or at work. That's the two places that I made my closest friends. And now I don't live in hostels and I, I work from the Airbnb or wherever I'm staying. So that's, I think, the probably the biggest difference.

Matt Bowles: Well, after Australia, I know you also then spent some time in Southeast Asia traveling around right before the pandemic, ended up shutting everything down. Can you share a little bit about the Southeast Asia trip?

Cara Laban: Yeah. So I continued my travel after Australia to Southeast Asia. And when I went to Southeast Asia, I had some savings, but definitely not enough to keep funding full time travel and long-term travel as I had wanted and planned to do. So, I started teaching English online because I didn't really think I could do anything else. I had been a waitress for six years. I didn't really ever work in corporate except two months as an intern in HR, which I hated. So, I was doing that and it was fun a little bit. I enjoy kids, but these kids did not want to be there learning English. So, it was really like pulling teeth sometimes. And I was making \$7 a. So that was roughly \$14 an hour if I got the lesson. Sometimes I only got three lessons every other day, so that maybe paid for my accommodation every other night or something like that.

So, when I was in Thailand, I remember so vividly being in Pai, which is in the north. It's really beautiful there, kind of a hippie little town near Chiang Mai. And my room was like, I didn't have windows, it was dark. I had my laptop piled on four pillows to give my lesson to my student. And I afterwards just had this mental breakdown of being like, is this my life? Either I have to choose between going back to New York and waitressing or getting a 9 to 5, or doing this and traveling this like this can't be it. And I had a similar breakdown. As you could see, I'd struggle with depression. So similar breakdown to I had in New York. And I was like, something needs to change. And I went to Pi Canyon that day. I'd already booked my day trip to Pie Canyon and it was one of the most beautiful places I'd ever seen. It was like a backdrop of a Hollywood set. It was just so stunning. And I was standing on that canyon. I was like, I could easily jump, but I actually don't want to or have the desire to right now. I feel like I'm going to figure out how to continue this life that I dream of without doing work that I hate.

Matt Bowles: I think it's really important to talk about the mental health stuff. I feel like that is a topic that is not talked about a lot, especially when people are discussing travel and the digital nomad lifestyle. So, I really appreciate you sharing that. And I'm at this point having gone through some of these low points that you've described. What techniques have you found or do you currently use for managing anxiety and depression, especially in an itinerant lifestyle of world travel?

Cara Laban: So, one of the most important things I have to tell myself constantly is this will pass, because it always does. Sometimes it's in a few days, sometimes it's weeks. But I always know it will pass, and I just kind of let myself be depressed. And that's the other part of it is when you're traveling quickly, especially, you feel like you have to go do all the things, you have to see all the things, and then you end up. It's a different kind of burnout when there's anxiety and depression involved because your body just, like, actually gives out and you lose the will to live. So, when I was feeling a bit down or depressed or anxious, I was like, I don't have to see or do anything today. And I actually remember another time in Phuket, I was like, I can't stay in a hostel tonight. I can't do it. I'm splurging a little, getting a hotel room. I got some Oreos and chocolate milk, and I sat on my bed and I watched Netflix. And I was only in Phuket for three days. And I was like, I'm not going to feel guilty that I'm doing this, because this is what I need right now. So, it's really just listening to what your body needs and not feeling guilty if you have to miss out on things when you're traveling.

Matt Bowles: I appreciate that so much, Cara, and I relate to that so much. Because if you do this as a lifestyle, you have to remember you're not just on vacation somewhere where you're trying to maximize every day of your vacation, and then you're returning to your normal life. This is your life. And so, everything that you're going to experience over the course of your life, you're going to experience in a place. And whichever place that is, you need to attend to the things in your life that you need to attend to. And that may mean that you're in a place for a while and you're not going to be doing all the things there are to do in that place, because you're attending the stuff that's in your life, because this is your life. If you live a digital nomad life.

So, 100% appreciate you saying that. I think that is super important. I think everyone that I know, including certainly myself, that is a digital nomad. It's like, have you ever been to this place? It's like, yeah, I was there, but I spent the entire month there just working on my business because I had something collapse and I had to focus entirely on that. I didn't see any of the place, or whether it's mental health or it's this other part of your life where I hadn't exercised in three months and I felt horrible. So, I just went to the gym every day and focused on that. That's like all I did in this place. And there's a lot of places in the world where I have those kinds of experiences where it's like, yep, nope, didn't do any of that tourist stuff. Don't even know about it. But I was there for a month. But that's not what I did. So, I think that's a really important perspective.

Cara Laban: It's also important to remember, wherever you go, there you are. I thought when I was depressed in New York, traveling to the other side of the world was going to cure me, and it didn't. I was still sitting on my floor crying, but I was sitting on my floor crying, going, well, at least I'm sitting on my floor crying in Australia. It helped a little bit. But I do have to remind myself now that travel often isn't going to solve my mental health issues. Of course, if you're feeling stagnant, you just need to get out of the city. We need a little change. It's going to help that. But if you struggle with depression and anxiety and other mental health things, it's not going to cure it.

Matt Bowles: That's a really important point as well. So now that you've been doing this for so many years, what are your thoughts on the healing potential of travel versus that risk you just described of running away from issues instead of dealing with them? And how do you balance that?

Cara Laban: Now, if you could think of travel as just one of your goals or dreams or whatever it is, the reason you want to travel, if it's one of those things, enjoy it and just don't expect it to cure you. That's all. If you actually have no interest in traveling and seeing places and learning new cultures, and you have no interest in doing that, stay home and work on your mental health there, because going somewhere else, you can't run away from yourself. You just can't do it.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to talk now about your transition from being an analog nomad, where you were traveling around the world and working local jobs to finance your next place that you were going to travel to, to becoming a digital nomad. Can you talk about when you connected with the amazing [Hannah Dixon](#), who Maverick Show listeners know because she's been on the podcast twice and is a dear friend of mine. But when did you find her virtual excellence academy training? And what was your experience like transitioning into the digital nomad lifestyle?

Cara Laban: So, when I was traveling Southeast Asia, I met this guy at a hostel who said he could get me a job in Alaska as a waitress at Denali National Park. And I was like, that's awesome. I'm going to go back to waitressing because I hate this teaching English online so much. And I can make a lot of money. I'm really excited. And then the pandemic happened and I went to my grandparent's place in Massachusetts because they had a house there and I didn't want to get anyone sick because I was traveling from Asia and they weren't at that house. So, I decided to go stay there for two weeks. Two weeks turned into six weeks totally alone in the middle of nowhere. And then my grandparents ended up coming up to the house in the summer.

And at this point, I was actually eligible to collect unemployment because my contract in Alaska was canceled. But I wouldn't have qualified for that if I didn't have that contract because I had been living abroad for two years prior, working in Australia. So, with my unemployment check, I was like, I am going to learn something and learn to work online. So, I went in a Facebook group. I don't remember what group it was, but I was like, here are all my soft skills. I don't even know if I knew to call them soft skills. At this point, I really knew nothing. I was like, I'm kind of funny. I could write a little bit. I used to Photoshop in middle school. I could do this; I could do that. And somebody's like, sounds like you would be a great virtual assistant. Check out [Hannah Dixon](#). She trains virtual assistants. She's actually speaking at a summit this week. It was a free summit. I went, I listened to her whole spiel and I bought the course. During her pitch, I was like, I'm doing it. I used my unemployment check for the week to sign up for the course, and I learned so much.

And I was really hesitant to becoming a virtual assistant because I had learned about it when I was living in Asia. And it was my impression that you can make up to \$15 an hour. And I was like, that's less than half that I make as a waitress, so I can't do that. But then Hannah talked about ethical pay and charging your worth or charging based on skills. And there's so much you could do as a virtual assistant that's like once you up level your skills, you could uplevel your pay. And I was like, okay, I'm in. So that's, that's where the journey started.

Matt Bowles: And then can you talk about your journey from there to building your business and what your current business looks like in terms of the services you offer today and who therefore and what it's like to work with you today?

Cara Laban: So, I started as a virtual assistant. I probably fell into the marketing assistant area. I was helping people send their newsletters, I was helping people repurpose content. And then I started working with, with this person who I'm still working with today. This was over five years ago and she needed help onboarding people into her group program. And she was like, every time someone signs up, I need you to do this, I need you to send this email, I need you to send them this. And I was like, is there no way to automate this? And she was like, I don't know, I don't know how to do it.

So, I learned how to automate and I realized I was pretty good at that and I had a real systems brain. So, I started getting more clients doing systems and workflows and that turned into client experience in general. General through tech and helping less tech savvy people or people who just didn't want to deal with that stuff, implementing those systems. So now I'm more of a systems and workflow consultant for small businesses.

Matt Bowles: What types of clients would be a good fit to work with you and then what is that experience like, how do you actually work with your clients?

Cara Laban: So, my clients are so across the board in what they offer. I have an Airbnb host, I have multiple E-Learning founders, I have a sex coach, I have a psychedelic as medicine coach right now who I'm onboarding. So, they're all across the board. But the commonality is that you work with people and you want to onboard them and you want to automate your business and your systems just kind of feel like a mess and you're doing too much manually or your clients aren't getting the VIP experience you want to give them. So that's who I work with and how you work with me is that you message me, you tell me what your business is, we schedule a 15-minute call or we go back and forth with email and we figure out how to work together and if it's going to be a good fit.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. I also want to ask you about your forthcoming book which is titled *How to Do Anything Even If You're Lazy*. Can you talk about the inspiration for this book and then what people can expect from it and maybe a little bit of a teaser about what the book is going to contain.

Cara Laban: So, with my systems brain, I noticed I was helping my clients with life stuff in addition to their work stuff. So, systems in their life and my friends too. And I started taking a few clients, helping them with life systems when they noticed their brain wasn't working in the way they thought it, quote unquote should and the traditional advice wasn't working for them. And people have always said to me, you're so capable. How do you figure out how to do this? How do you figure out how to do that? As somebody who really does struggle with depression, anxiety, PMDD, all the other letters, and I looked at what I did and how I make things work for myself because I never really, really thought about it, put a name to it.

And I developed a framework from what I do. And I've been in therapy for 20 years and I also have a degree in psychology. And I signed up for this program to give talks because I realized I would actually prefer to work one to many in the life systems rather than one to one. So, I put together this talk called how to do anything even if you're lazy. And it was a 30-minute talk and I was like, I have so much more to say on this topic. So, I started writing a book. I'll straight up tell you what the framework is. It's called the Ease framework. It's just four steps. The first E stands for expresses the actual want. A lot of us will say

something that we want, but it's not what we actually want. For example, you might say, I wish I was a morning person. But you don't mean you wish you were a morning person. You mean you wish you had more time to do things for you before you went to work, or just throughout the day outside of work. That's what you really mean.

So, it's expressing the actual need. It's like pinpointing what you're actually trying to do. The A is assessing the steps. So just listing out without any judgment the actual physical things that you are doing when you try to do the thing that you're aiming to do. And then usually you could spot a snag, which is the S, something's tripping you up every single time you go to do that thing. So, then the last E is experiment, change that one thing, it might be one or two things. There should always be small physical changes you can make and it should never be a personality flaw that you're blaming on yourself. It's never I'm lazy, I'm stupid, I'm this, I'm that. It's a physical thing that is tripping you up. So, you try that experiment. If it works, great. If it doesn't work, try another experiment and then you repeat the process again. So, this book will break down that give lots of different examples of how I've applied it to my own life, how I've applied it to my clients' lives, my friends and partner. That's what the book's about. So, it's a little bit of a mix of a memoir mixed with self-help from somebody who has done it themselves rather than from a therapist point of view.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. Well, as soon as the book is ready for pre order, definitely let me know and we will get that out to the listeners.

Cara Laban: It is so close. I've written 14 chapters so far. I think I have five or six left.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. I am super excited for that. And we have to talk about your new platform, [Travel Reddi](#), which I have been using and exploring and deep diving into. And it has become my new favorite, favorite travel planning tool. Cara, I am so impressed with this. Shall we begin with explaining to people the concept? What problem were you solving? What value were you trying to deliver? What is [Travel Reddi](#)? And then we'll dive into some of the features because I'm super excited about this.

Cara Laban: Yeah. Oh, I'm so glad to hear that you're using it and loving it. Can't wait to hear specifically what you love about it. But [Travel Reddi](#) is an international travel preparedness tool school where you put in the destination that you're going to and you could get a custom guide because you could then put in your own passport, your month of travel and the specific region you're going to for larger countries. And you are going to get everything you need to know before you go from what visa or documents do you need? What is banned from bringing into that country? What time of year is good to go? What are common scams that happen in that place? Is it vegan friendly? Is it solo woman travel friendly? Everything you need to know logistically is in this app and the long-term goal for this is to nudge you. So, when I have an actual iOS-based app to remind you to do these things like get an ESIM to apply for your visa and all of this stuff.

Matt Bowles: Okay, let me wax poetic about this for a little bit and tell you exactly what I love about this. Okay, so first of all, you can put in your own country passport that you're traveling on, as you mentioned, and then the country that you're going to. And based on those two things, it will tell you all of the entry requirements, visa, how much does it cost, what's the exchange rate between your currency and the local currency that you're going to, and so forth. So that is customized based on your own passport in the country you're going to. So that alone, I was like, okay, that's incredibly high value because that varies for every country you go to and depending on what passport you're traveling on.

Then the other thing that I appreciated so much was that it recommends the specific mobile apps that you need for a particular place, including which rideshare services work in this city. And here's the app for that so you can download it. What are the popular messaging apps in this city? This is significant. And for people that haven't been to certain places, for example, I went to Korea and I was living in Seoul for five weeks. People do not use WhatsApp in Seoul. They use Kakao. And so, I was like, can we just message on WhatsApp? They're like, no, but you can download the Kakao app and we can message on there. I was like, oh, okay. So, I have the Kakao app on my phone. I use it nowhere else but Korea. But every time I go to Korea, got to use it, right? You go to Japan and they use Line. You go to China and they use WeChat. And there's these different apps that are used really prominently in different places.

And so, when you go to [Travel Reddi](#), it's like, okay, yeah, you're going to China, you better download WeChat. You go to Japan, you better download Line, and so on. And that is really helpful. And then it tells you what food delivery services work in that place. And you need to download that app. And then it tells you you're going to be traveling around on the subway or on the buses. There's a specific app for the subway and the buses in that particular place. And so based on the country that you're going to, you just have all that. My whole travel experience, Cara, has been like, landing somewhere and then figuring out what ride. Oh, they don't have Uber here. They have Careem or they have whatever. The other services, they have Bolt, they have Grab or they have whatever, and I didn't have that app.

Cara Laban: Yeah. I don't know if it's happened to you, but it has literally happened to me where it's a double whammy where you go to order an Uber. And maybe Uber does exist in that place, but it's so limited because it's new or they have another ride share app. So, I was like, I can't get an Uber. Let me download Bolt or Cabify, whatever is popular here. But I also didn't get an ESIM before I went and I am away from Wi-Fi and I'm like, now I have to go walk somewhere with all my luggage. This has happened multiple times to me. I'm like, why is there nowhere for me to find out what apps I need and why is there nothing reminding me to get an ESIM because I forgot or I didn't get a physical sim because I forgot or whatever it is. So, a lot of this came out of just forgetting or not knowing because a lot of people just don't know what they don't know.

Matt Bowles: Exactly. And this also I'm going to keep going.

Cara Laban: Please do.

Matt Bowles: It tells you specifically details on transportation from the airport. That is incredibly helpful because again, I land at an airport, I'm like, oh, is there a subway directly that goes into the city? Oh, there's not. Well, how do I get into the city? What are my options? How much do they cost? How long do they take? All this stuff? So, you have all of that in advance. You're going to be able to see what the transportation options are like into the city. You also have this cultural preparation in terms of things to know in terms of how to be respectful in terms of avoiding common tourist mistakes. And as you mentioned, the scams to look out for that happen in local places and all of that stuff.

Before you go, you're going to have exactly what apps to download, everything that you need so that when you land, you're going to already know what's the rideshare service. Oh, I already have the subway map on my phone. I already have the bus route map on my phone. I already have those apps. It's all set up. I know exactly what I'm doing, how I'm getting to the airport, to my place and all this kind of stuff. And you even have a thing where you can put in the date of your trip and it's going to show you the weather and the

seasonal stuff that's going on at that particular time of year in that place. So, this is my new favorite platform, Cara. I'm loving it.

Cara Laban: Thank you so much for loving on it, first of all, and looking through it and giving that feedback. It means so much.

Matt Bowles: And the best part, just for everyone that's listening this at the moment, I don't know if it's going to stay this way. You can tell me. But at the moment, it is entirely free to use. So how can people start using this for free?

Cara Laban: Yeah, so you could go to travelreddi.com/maverick and you'll get to be one of the first beta users of this site. If you have any feedback, I'm open to it. There's a form on the site that you could fill out. So, if you see any missing scams, any missing information, any. Any wrong information, shouldn't be outdated just yet because it's still a pretty new platform. You could go ahead and be one of my first users and I would so love if you were.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part one for direct links to everything we have discussed in this episode, including all the ways to find, follow and connect with Cara, and the direct link for how you can start using [Travel Reddi](https://Travel.Reddi) for free. All of that is going to be in [the show notes](#), so just go to themaverickshow.com and go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. And be sure to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Cara Laban. Good night, everybody.