

**INTRO:** This is part two of my interview with Priyanka Surio. If you have not yet listened to [part one](#), I highly recommend you, you go back and do that first because it provides some really important context for this episode. If you have already heard [part one](#), then please enjoy part two of my interview with Priyanka Surio.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I want to dive into sustainable and regenerative travel with you. I feel like a good place to start, though, as we get into that topic, would be to talk about some of the problems and how you became aware of them. So, I want to start with a quote that you wrote which says; *“the first truth I had to realize about traveling as a hobby and an industry is that it is largely extractive, unsustainable, and may disrupt or attempt to erase a country's culture through colonialism, capitalism, and gentrification of neighborhoods that have evolved from mostly local to expat or foreign”*. I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about how you arrived at that awareness and then from there, the journey to your advocacy for sustainable and regenerative travel.

**Priyanka Surio:** Some of these experiences were part of my learnings when I went to India, when I went to different countries in Africa. Just understanding how much tourism was both part of the economy, but also if you weren't able to be part of that, then as you try to be competitive in this economic market or you try to live in the places where tourists were coming, soon the prices would go up or you would be bought out by large chain hotels that largely were not from there. They were global. And it's interesting because some of my first exposures to that extraction and some of the ways in which people have been pushed out and actually happened in America and its territories. So, I remember being in Hawaii and I remember also being in Puerto Rico.

So, both of these places are still part of the U.S. Ecosystem. And yet there were a lot of people who were native Hawaiian or Polynesian, and they were talking about how they were not getting fair wages at the local chain hotel. And it wasn't a hotel that was local, it wasn't owned by a local, was owned by some conglomerate somewhere else. And they weren't getting paid enough. And the prices were going up and too many tourists were coming and driving those prices up. People were setting prices higher. They could no longer live or feed their families. And I thought, that is ridiculous. These are people who live here. How are they not able to live here? But the tourists, meanwhile, are being fed well and being treated well. And I thought that was unfair. And that protest happened during my time. I was there for a week. It was going on the whole week. So that was part of my experience. My first time in Hawaii was that.

And then I remember going to Puerto Rico. And the first time I went was after Hurricane Maria. And we were also trying to fuel the economy. It was a work trip, actually. So, part of hosting it there was to fuel the local economy. But I don't remember seeing any locals where we were. When we were in San Juan, New San Juan, actually. And you had to go deeper into the pockets to actually meet some locals. But so many people were not local, Puerto Rican or Boricuan. And I thought that was so odd. And I remember the second time I ever visited Puerto Rico, it was with a friend who's not Puerto Rican, but American. And essentially, they had rented this house. And I'll never forget what one of their guests said. There was a woman who was going with her daughter to the beach and this house happened to be near the beach side. And they were like, hey, you can't go this way. This is private property. You can't go. And she was trying to explain. No, this beach has always been open. It's always been a public beach. And this person was like, no. This is this person's beach. You can't. You have to go somewhere else. This is not allowed.

And came downstairs and basically shooed her away. I remember thinking that was odd, but I wasn't sure. Is it private property? And I remember looking up, no. All the beaches in Puerto Rico are supposed to be public. There are some that are owned by resorts, but that beach, there was no resort there. There were a

couple houses, and you could honestly walk up and down the coastline and be at the same beach. But the fact he thought was happening by someone who's not from Puerto Rico really rubbed me the wrong way. And so, when I did go to these other countries outside of America, then I was much more hyper aware of it. Okay, what is the sentiment towards Airbnb or Turds hotels? Where can I actually do things more locally? Can I find local BNBs or home exchanges or other kinds of experiences? Or perhaps let me talk to my host on the Airbnb app and see what their experience is. I've had many people now who've gone off the Airbnb app, and I still remain in contact with them so that if I return, I book directly through them. And they're local, they're steeped in their community. And so that was one way that really changed how I even book accommodations.

I think the other thing to be mindful of is just when does over tourism or when does tourism become a negative thing for a community? So even if I want to go here, now may not be the right time. I may be taxing resources that this country desperately needs and that the people desperately need. And so, it also played a role in removing the bucket list from my lingo and thinking more deeply about, am I even needed here? Is my presence here going to be additive? Am I going to come in and drain the resources and push the local people out? How do they feel about me being here? And I would honestly want to do my research and due diligence on that, which would come in the way of, of course, the Internet, but also when I got there, talking to my taxi driver, talking to the local people on the street, how do you feel about tourists? How do you feel about this and that and the other.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, you've got a formula and a framework in your book, which I want to go through in detail because I think it's helpful for folks that are interested in learning a little bit about this. But can we just start with a definition in terms of the difference between sustainable travel and regenerative travel. Can you explain what each of those means?

**Priyanka Surio:** So just to give a very high level, crisp definition, sustainable travel adopts principles such as protection, preservation, leave no trace, working to control and contain our impact, or footprint reducing negative impact. Regenerative travel, on the other hand, encourages involvement and integration with the goal of having a noticeable positive impact on people, cultures, places and creatures.

**Matt Bowles:** Okay, and then your framework is based on four mindsets and four world changing forces. So, let's start with the four mindsets and if you can share what those four are and then let's talk through each of them and maybe give an example.

**Priyanka Surio:** Thank you for that question. So obviously you heard the definitions and when I first heard these definitions of, okay, I'm planning sustainability in my trip, or regenerative thinking and planning in my trip, I don't really know what that means or what that looks like. So how about the same thing? And what helped me understand and dissect those was to create a framework and someone who likes to have a bit of categorization, order, some kind of guide to help me with whatever I plan to do. And so, I did a lot of research to pull together this framework. And part of that was reading tons of articles, reading about them in the sustainability space, reading about them in the travel space. It was interesting to see how they differed. But ultimately, I came away with certain keywords that everyone was talking about or agreeing on.

And I realized that before you could even get to these words, you had to be in the right state of mind, you had to want to do this kind of travel. So, my framework is essentially made up of four mindsets plus four world changing forces that equals infinity or a regenerative way of traveling. And it's eight sideways. So, I was very creative with the framework and the formula itself. But we'll start with the mindsets and then we

can get into the world changing forces, because like I said, you have to be in the right state of mind. You have to want this. So, the mindsets are *Finding Truth*. And *Finding Truth* is essentially understanding the history of a people, of a place. How has colonization played a role? Capitalism over tourism? How has the travel industry evolved here? Understanding the culture as well, those are things that is *Finding Truth*. It's a very much a discovery. You're learning, you're here to kind of observe. You're not doing anything yet.

**Matt Bowles:** And I think that is such an important thing that I encourage people to do. I'll just give one example for me, in terms of how I apply this to my travels as an American, I think it is really important for me when I'm going to a place to understand the history of particularly U.S. Government foreign policy in that country that I am going to. So, for example, we mentioned Vietnam a while ago. I think it's very important when I go to Southeast Asia that I am aware of the history of U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia, or when I'm going to Central and South America, it's very important for me to understand that it was my government that overthrew democracies, installed dictatorships, trained death squads on American soil, and then sent them back there to destroy those countries.

And so, when I step into that, there's a reason why countries are the way that they are, and particularly if my government has played a role historically or currently in shaping that, I think it is especially important for me to understand that. I think it's important to learn the history in general, even if my government didn't have a big role in it. But the United States government has had a role in a lot of different parts of the world. And so, for me, I think that's really important just as a conscious traveler, to learn about that and look up that history and just to understand that. But also, we've been talking here a lot about the different diaspora communities that you might find in a particular place and how those diaspora communities might have gotten to that particular place.

And so, in addition to the people that are originally from here, what about the different types of immigrant communities? Where did they come from? What's their story? How are they treated in this society? What's their role here and which immigrant communities are most prominent here and why is that the case? And all of that is for me a super interesting, but also, I think a super important thing to understand when you're stepping into that. So, when I was reading through your framework, Mark, I really appreciated that you started off with that because I was like, yes, that is super important. So, okay, so that's number one, *Finding Truth*. And so, keep going with the other three mindsets.

**Priyanka Surio:** The second mindset is *Open Mindedness*. And I'd be remiss to say that sure, you can follow the order of each of these mindsets, but you can also start with where feels most natural for you. And I designed it with that in mind. So maybe you are a more open-minded person and then you have to find truths, but also when you find the truth, you become more open minded. So *Open Mindedness* is all about being open literally to the people, to the different cultures, the different foods, the different customs, things that make you uncomfortable, things that are foreign, things that are unknown. And the more that you lean into that and the more that you go outside of the bubble, that might be how the tourism industry has been designed to make you feel a sense of familiarity or to make you feel like you're at home. The more you go out of that bubble, the more you're actually going to find the true essence of a place.

**Matt Bowles:** And I have tons of examples of that as well. I have so many travel experiences, I'm just like, yeah, you know, it's like you go to Kuala Lumpur and they're like, do you want to try durian? And I'm like, sure, I'll try durian, I'm in Kuala Lumpur. So, I think that's really important. All right, so *Open Mindedness* is number two. And then what is number three?

**Priyanka Surio:** Number three is *Resilience*. It dovetails really nicely with open mindedness because you're now embracing being in this unknown, unfamiliar territory. But part of that is being comfortable with being uncomfortable, learning how to develop the skills and strategies to be comfortable even in that unknown and to know that that's where your growth is going to happen, that's where the transformation is going to happen. That if you lean into that again, on that other side is something deeper. It's you reconnecting with yourself in many ways or learning more about yourself, as well as deeply connecting with that place or the people. It's also overcoming your fears.

So, one thing that I get asked a lot from different people about my lifestyle is just how do I feel comfortable and safe? Traveling oftentimes as a solo female traveler. And a lot of that is by building that muscle of resilience, learning who and what to trust, being able to trust myself, especially in those moments, and the kinds of things that I've equipped myself to be able to handle, that I have a plan in place that I know how to do this, that even if I don't know how to do this, I'm going to figure it out. So, it's very much that sentiment of you is going to figure it out and you're going to be able to push through this experience, even if it is completely unfamiliar to you. It's about being adaptable in that moment. And the more you do it, the more you're going to become better at it, the more you'll be able to adapt. And I will say nomads have this particular mindset down pat the fact that we always are moving and having to be in unfamiliar situations and learn how to essentially work or balance work or freelance in all these new environments makes us very well suited to being resilient.

**Matt Bowles:** And I think it really builds and compounds over time as well. The first time you go to a country where they speak a completely different language and you don't speak that language, you might be apprehensive about that. You might be like, if people don't speak my language and I don't speak theirs, how will I get by? How will I find this stuff? And then when you go. And then some of my best travel memories are just trying to communicate with people that they don't speak my language and I don't speak theirs at all. And they are putting in so much effort to try to help me with whatever it is that I need. I need to get somewhere, I need to figure something out, I need to do something. And they're willing to just drop what they're doing and come and try to help me even if they don't speak my language. And some of those have just been the most heartwarming moments. And now I just have such a confidence in humanity and the good-hearted nature of human beings that I could just be anywhere in the world. And no matter how unfamiliar it is or whether I speak the language or whatever it may be, I know that I can find really amazing people that would help me if I needed them too. And I think that's just a comfort level in general with humanity that builds over time from traveling the world.

**Priyanka Surio:** And I'm glad that you said that because these mindsets, while they are very much a personal journey, you don't have to develop them all by yourself in isolation. They're very much designed to pull on the travel experiences that you're going to have. I look at travel as this skill, this muscle that you're building as you go around these places. And so, people are there to help you find the truth. They'll tell you people are there to help you be open minded. They're like, come on, try that durian, it's going to be fine, we all eat it. You know, the people are there to help you be resilient by showing you how they would navigate a situation or helping you when you're in trouble. And then you from there learn the skills or develop the relationship to where you now have someone who can help you navigate that country. So, I love how you said that because absolutely important to understand. We don't learn these things on our Own. We learn them in community a hundred percent.

**Matt Bowles:** Okay, so what is the fourth mindset.

**Priyanka Surio:** Dovetailing very nicely with community talk is *Giving Back*. So now that you've gone through this kind of cycle of understanding the different mindsets, there's this mindset of *Giving Back*. You want to have a positive impact. You want to leave something behind versus just taking. And in a way, this flips the travel industry and notion of travel as a product that you purchase, that you get some value from. It flips it on its head. It really does. Because travel, in many ways, as I mentioned in that quote, is extractive. And when you're *Giving Back*, you're trying to not be extractive, you're trying to be additive. And it's having that generosity, that inquisitiveness of where can I give back that's actually meaningful that will do some good, that can be partly woven in through that mindset of just, again, all these different things, listening out for it. Where can I be helpful? Where is someone asking me for help? Where's someone needing something? Where can I offer some of my own skills?

Part of that is being very creative in that way to think about where those potential avenues or opportunities. And I guarantee you, when you do that, you have a much deeper experience, because now you've actually thought deeply, how can I give to this place? When you do that, you build this relationship, you build this kind of connection to the land, to the people, to the creatures, and it makes you want to either come back or that memory is rooted in your life forever. It is transformative. And ultimately, I think that's the key. These things about being sustainable as a traveler, being regenerative, they allow you to have more deeper and authentic experiences with the place, which is really that essence of what it means to be a traveler. I guarantee you it will be much more fun than if you just did the itinerary and the top 10 things.

**Matt Bowles:** Do you have an example of how you seek that out when you're going to travel somewhere about how can I give back? Or maybe give an example of a way that that's unfolded for you somewhere?

**Priyanka Surio:** Yeah. So again, sometimes these things happen very serendipitously, but it's a matter of positioning yourself in a right place, right time. And so, I was in Costa Rica on the Pacific side, and I was just walking along the beach. I knew that there were different conservation efforts. And so that was in the back of my mind to visit. And I had visited a couple on the Caribbean side already in the Pacific side. I wasn't as familiar with some of them, especially further down in the peninsula in a place called Osa. So, I was just there to essentially explore and to be open. And part of that meant go out, go outside, go out in the community, go out in the villages. And some of these areas were not as touristy as some parts of Costa Rica. So, it was actually quite nice. It allowed me to deeply connect with locals and to see things outside of that particular lens. Sometimes when things are curated for tourists, it can be very much in that bubble. And then you don't really know. Is this giving back in a way that's sustainable, in a way that's actually authentic? Who knows?

But for me, it meant just going out in lesser-known places, lesser touristy places, and talking with people and just walking. So, I was walking along the beach and just talking to different people. And there's this one guy who is very interested in what I was talking about around finding regenerative sites in Costa Rica. And he's like, I'm waiting for this group to come. They're a group of volunteers. They had to go through this process to volunteer with my site. It's a nursery for turtles. But if you're interested, based on what you're talking about, I would invite you. And we're saying all this in Spanish, by the way, so speaking in the local language does go a long way, even if you only know a few words that allowed for that exchange, I think, to be more available to us. And he him to even feel comfortable inviting me, this stranger walking on the beach. But then he invites me to this turtle sanctuary, this nursery, where they're basically saving baby turtles that are sometimes poached, sometimes the eggs are stolen.

They're basically allowing them to hatch in a safe place and then go back to the ocean to allow that natural ecosystem of turtles hatching and living. And some of the turtles had been endangered. So, a lot of this work was reversing endangerment. And I even got to help out because we built that rapport. We were talking, I was open enough to go and see this turtle sanctuary with the group. I had not applied, but we had got to talking. And I think part of it is just an openness to having those conversations, to listening, to keeping your ear out for those opportunities. And then when they present themselves, seizing that moment, okay, this is the moment for I'm being asked, I'm being invited. I think that's part of it, is like, am I invited to do this? Am I being asked to help? Or am I just putting my own thoughts about what needs to change or what needs to improve on a people or on a place.

**Matt Bowles:** Awesome. Okay, so we've got the four mindsets; *Finding Truth*, *Open Mindedness*, *Resilience* and *Giving Back*. And now we want to pair those four mindsets with the four world changing forces. Can you talk us through those one at a time as well?

**Priyanka Surio:** *Giving Back* is the first mindset that gives you more towards action. And that's why it pairs nicely with the four world changing forces. These are essentially the actions that you're now going to be able to take. Now that you're in the right mindset, you're ready for this, you want to be a sustainable and regenerative traveler. These give you those tactical steps on what to do to be that way. And the other thing I'll say about the four world changing forces is that in the research that I had compiled for my books, these were the flow that came up the most across the industry. There was no standard, I don't think there is still today, on how to be sustainable and regenerative and how to measure that and how to do that across the industry. It still varies a lot. But these four continued to come up, which is why I honed in on them.

And the first one is reducing your carbon footprint. And so that's actually the first action that comes to mind with a lot of people when they think of sustainable travel. They're like, oh, well, you travel so much, how do you do this? And there are many ways to do that. We talked already about minimalism and being a minimal person, living minimally reusing things. And so, I also weave that into when I travel. It means actually having items that you can reuse, whether that is a reusable bottle for your water or whether that's reusable straws. So even going further into that, beyond just being a minimal person, you can bring that into your travels as well. It also means maybe not turning on all the lights in your place, but leaving them off or letting the natural sunlight come in.

And so, there are little tweaks and things that you can do within your lifestyle when you're traveling. In addition to obviously being mindful of your footprint when you are traveling, there are a lot of different ways to minimize that as well. So besides thinking about maybe flying somewhere and that is burning a lot of carbon, you can think about it in the way of will I be able to offset that in some way? And I don't mean in a passive way, there are carbon credits where people can purchase different projects that then reduce their carbon footprint. But in many ways, I feel like that's lazy. And no offense to people who do that, but it is not allowing you to build the muscle to reduce that footprint. You're putting that responsibility on someone else.

So, I met this woman from Argentina who said that basically when she takes a flight, she plants her own damn trees instead of purchase a carbon credit for someone else to do it. And I very much appreciated that. It made me want to get involved in more restorative and conservation type of efforts in a place where I may be for a longer time, whether that was in the country or outside of the country. No matter, at least I'm getting involved in conserving our earth, which is part of that footprint piece and part of the carbon emissions. So that's the other piece to this. But finally, with the carbon footprint, it's what mode of

transportation am I taking throughout my trip? So, am I flying everywhere back and forth? Am I going out of my comfort zone to take a train or a bus ride? Or maybe I'm open to biking or walking everywhere. I love walking everywhere.

Honestly, it lets me see more deeply places. I just mentioned that story about walking on the beach in Costa Rica and it led to this beautiful experience. And so sometimes it's actually thinking about when I'm in the country I'm in, can I reduce my footprint by walking, by biking, by taking the train around the country and of flying everywhere around the country. And I certainly did that in India. Europe is very easy for that. But I would challenge you to do that in other places too. In Morocco, I took a train literally all over Morocco and I didn't even think that that was possible. Again, the certain narratives that were told, but just push a little bit harder, deeper. And there are certain apps like Rome to Rio, there are certain resources, again, people within hotels or other types of industries who can tell you, yes, this is possible if you want to do it. It just might be a longer ride, which usually is the most adventurous one.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah, I think there are so many positives to that. So, for me, when I am in a city, I love to walk as well. But the other thing I'll do is go jogging. Because if I'm going to have some exercise in my day, why not also see the city at the same time? So, let's say I, for example, love to look up what are the best coffee shops and see the coffee shop culture in a city, especially if that city has a particularly good coffee shop culture. And so, wherever I'm based, then I'll say, okay, what are the really good coffee shops within a mile and a half radius of my place? And then each day I'll just maybe jog to one of those coffee shops. And so, then I'll get the exercise. Jogging through the city, I'll see different stuff. Maybe I'm in a city that has really cool street art or, you know, just really interesting architecture, or just whatever the vibe of the city is. I'll just see what people are up to, what they're outside doing and what local life is like, because you're just jogging by and then you wind up at the coffee shop and then there you are, and that's the place you want to be. And now you can order a coffee and sit down and experience it. So, jogging through cities and walking through cities are two of my very favorite things.

And the other thing is when you take public transportation somewhere, like you just take the subway everywhere in the city the way that local folks do. It's just a much more immersive experience also, right. Then taking a taxi or an Uber. Now you're traveling the way that the people travel, and you're getting to have a much more local, much more immersive experience. And I think slow travel as well is a really good piece of that. So instead of just moving through super quickly, post up in a place for one to three months or so and live there. And then you shop at the grocery store and you take the subway every day and you, you know, you live like a local person. For me, that's been one of the most meaningful ways to actually get to feel like you are participating in and connecting with a city and the people in that city. And I think it's also much more sustainable for the reasons that you just mentioned.

**Priyanka Surio:** And I love that you mentioned slow travel, because that's exactly what taking other forms of transit forces you to do. It forces you to slow down. And you just shared such a beautiful story. You had this whole journey to the coffee shop. You wouldn't have had that story if you just Ubered. So, I absolutely agree. And by doing it that way, you're also integrating. That would bring me to my second world changing force. If I may, you mentioned culture and art. So, promoting cultural awareness is the other action you can take, the world changing force you can take. And what that means is you have slowed down enough to actually witness culturally what's going on, to have the conversations with locals and with different people about their practices, to see the art, to learn and hear from the artists, coffee shops are actually a great way to meet them. I remember being in Johannesburg and listening to a poet activist just by merely

sauntering around and then going into a coffee shop and then there happened to be a poet activist for the day.

And so, there are really these threads of culture that happen that you may not have known about, that are not always on an itinerary, that are not always part of a guided tour. In many ways, I actually would rather it be that way, organic. It's already part of the fabric of this place. It's already something self-organized. It wasn't created for me or for a tourist. It was part of what people were already doing, what people already do to express themselves and to express their heritage. And I like being able to experience that in its authenticity. And so, promoting cultural awareness is really leaning into some of those experiences, really leaning into is this truly culturally authentic or is it a performance? And so, I remember doing some research about this and also in my own travels, being very mindful whenever I participate or partake in indigenous ceremonies. Because I learned about how sometimes these are very performative and how the ceremonies are not always steeped in their original form or the original intention.

One example of this is when I was at the border of Costa Rica and Panama. I was invited to partake in a cacao ceremony from the Bribri tribe. Very authentic. But I saw tons of cacao ceremonies all over Costa Rica. So, I remember asking my guide Minora about this and he said, oh, that's very performative. It's for money, it's for show. And I learned that the cacao ceremonies that they host are for when they're inviting a guest over. And it's usually more of like you're just inviting kind of one or two people. It's not a big group or when someone's giving birth or when someone's transitioning into adulthood or some other rite of passage. And those are very specific reasons as to why you would have a ceremony. Not just here's a cool cacao ceremony that they do here. We're just going to do it. It's almost infringing and imposing on the culture. And so that's the duality of promoting cultural awareness is that you've done your homework. You've used finding truth to really understand why are people doing this? What is the true intention behind it?

**Matt Bowles:** Well, first of all, big shout out to Johannesburg. I love that city. It's so amazing. It has so much rich art and culture and history and everything. I want to encourage everybody to spend time in Johannesburg but I think the point that you just made is a really important one, and it's not talked about that often, which is this concept. This might actually even be a little bit of an adjacent concept to what you were talking about. But this concept of staged authenticity, which is this colonial loop, whereby there's a colonial representation of a particular place, which is people from the colonial society are socialized into that particular stereotype. But the people from that society know that the people from the colonial society are socialized into that stereotype. And they know that when people from the colonial society come there, that's what they expect to see and that's what they want to see. And so, if they put on a performance delivering the colonial stereotype that they think the tourists want to see, the tourists will pay them for that. And so, then you have this colonial loop which just goes like that. And so, I totally agree. I mean, I think it's really important to be aware of that kind of stuff. And that's exactly where your first mindset of *Finding Truth* comes into play.

**Priyanka Surio:** You mentioned something very important that I don't know that we've explicitly stated. But it's about decolonizing travel and tourism experiences. And so, when you are promoting cultural awareness, when you are finding the truth, you are actually decolonizing and sometimes decapitalizing some of these things. These are people's homes; these are people's lives. You are a guest there. And so sometimes we always, when we're thinking about travel, what can it give me? What can I experience? But I don't know that we always do that. Deeper diving into, at what cost? Is this experience truly going to be

something that's great for this place? That's part of the decolonizing aspect is you're essentially going against that extractive nature. The forward world changing force that I'll get into just as we're continuing to go along. This is protecting wildlife and biodiversity.

And so, there are many ways that you can do this both actively and passively. Part of that could be in how you select the experiences that you select. So, there's a lot of damage, I would say, that's been done in terms of certain animal experiences. People riding on elephants, people being able to touch dolphins or turtles. And that's very disruptive for these creatures. And we don't always know that. We just go off of what's on social media or what someone else has posted and think, wow, that's so amazing. They got to have this experience. I want it too. And then all of a sudden, we're all kind of disrupting. And something I've learned, as I've been delved deeper into this, is that when you do start to disrupt an ecosystem, the animals eventually will leave. They'll either leave because they're going somewhere else where they're not going to be bothered, or they're leaving because you're disrupting them so much.

There's so many tourists coming that it's creating an ecosystem that's no longer habitable for them, and they start dying out. And I would hate to be the reason why something is dying, literally. And I remember being in India, actually in the homeland where my father's from in Vizag, and seeing turtles on the beach. And I thought that they were just washed up there, maybe hatching eggs. And when I went closer, I realized that they were dead. And it was one of the most traumatic experiences that I had there. But also, I came to understand that there had been this show that had happened in the water, and a bunch of people had gone there, and there was a lot of toxins and a lot of disruption, and it killed these turtles. And it made me very sad to know that that happened. It also made me wonder whether people knew that that was disruptive. I think sometimes we don't really know what we don't know, especially when it comes to animal interaction, because so much of us don't live around animals. And so, part of this is also understanding that, but also maybe doing your due diligence of understanding animals and what animals are native here and in their wild and natural habitat, too.

So, something I had to learn, and I learned this in Ethiopia, is that there are zoos which enclose animals in a particular place. But then there are things called wildlife sanctuaries. And the intention of the sanctuaries is to release the animal in the wild eventually. That's always the goal, unless the animal is too sick or too injured to be released. And then it's about rehabilitation, but it's not about having a spectation of the animal. Like people are not spectating and looking and expecting to see something. It's much more about this relationship of healing and releasing and conserving. And so that was something I learned there. And it made me much more mindful about visiting zoos in the future and actually doing homework to see if I could visit a wildlife sanctuary or a rehabilitation center, which, again, is a much cooler experience. You literally get to see these animals living how they normally would out in the wild, or at least on that journey towards being out in the wild. And I remember being in Costa Rica again, I spent some time there, so I have a lot of memories. But I remember seeing parrots be released. It was their release day. And I remember traveling further down south and then seeing parrots freely flying around and wondering if that was released from this same conservation center or not. But again, a much deeper experience. And so that's a wildlife and biodiversity action that you can take.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, so the world changing forces we've discussed so far are reducing your carbon footprint, promoting cultural awareness, protecting wildlife and biodiversity, and then what is number four?

**Priyanka Surio:** And last, but certainly not least is fueling local economy. And so just to draw the thread here with a story I shared earlier about Hawaii and how they were protesting that hotel where they weren't

getting paid fairly and where it was really being disruptive of the culture. When I think about local, I really think about local. Who are the people who have grown up here, who have generations here? Am I buying into their products and services and business, or is it a foreign entity? Is that dollar going to go outside of the country or place or is it going to come back in? And that is sometimes a lot harder to discern, especially when you do have certain experiences that have a local tour guide. But part of that is doing, again, that research, whether it's asking the tour company or asking even your tour guide how they're getting paid or what is their cut, or what is that relationship that they have with that entity. So that's one. And then a fun one that I love doing is going to local markets.

And so, I remember being in Ethiopia, there's a huge market notice, Ababa, and you could spend all day there, but people are selling everything and anything. And because that was one of my formative travel experiences I had there, it inspired me to look for markets like that in other places. Now, Ethiopia will always be the land of origins. Also in my mind, the origin of this big market, I think second maybe is Marrakech. The Medinah is also pretty large. And this maze of all kinds of things that are being sold, whether it's an experience or whether it's a fruit juice. But those kinds of experiences, they also steep you in the culture too. So, for me, when I think about this one, I actually love to be able to buy local feels more authentic. It's fueling the people directly. But you also get to have this really cool experiences when you go out into those places that are more authentically known, that have been around for hundreds or thousands of years.

**Matt Bowles:** That is such an important piece of the entire travel experience for me is actually going to experience the local commerce. How do these local markets work? And being able to see what are they selling? And this stuff is super different. I've never seen stuff like that before. And that's interesting. Then there's oftentimes a culture of bartering, and you can get into making people laugh as you're trying to negotiate the thing with them. And then eventually you're going to, of course, buy it from them. But it's fun to just have this interaction in the local cultural style of how the market exchanges work. And then you start to learn about the local culture as you're doing that. And then you make somebody smile and maybe they haven't had a foreigner come in and interact with them like that. And now you're both laughing and enjoying it. And they walked away with a sale, and you have something cool to either have for yourself or gift to someone as a souvenir or whatever it is. And so, yeah, I think that's such an important part of every place.

So, all of the cities that I'll go to, I will for sure look for that, even in terms of food vendors and stuff like that as well. You know, when I mentioned when I'm going to places and I'm living there for a longer period of time, I'll go to the grocery store, which, by the way, I think is super interesting. And I do encourage people to go to the grocery store, because grocery stores in foreign countries are absolutely fascinating. Even if you're not living there and you're not trying to buy a whole bunch of stuff from the grocery store, just go in and walk around and just see what they have and what they sell and how they sell it and how different it is, because it's just interesting. But to that point as well, trying also to say, okay, yeah, maybe I'll go to the grocery store and I'll buy certain things from there. But there's also really local vendors that are just on the corner selling fresh fruit or selling fresh something. Can I buy my fruit from the vendor on the corner as opposed to buying it from the grocery store?

The larger conglomerate, if you live somewhere, maybe as you start doing those walks around your block or those jogs around your neighborhood, you'd be like, oh, the banana vendor is on the corner every single day over here, and this person's over there. And I say hello to them when I run by, and they always are smiling and looking at me like, who's this white guy jogging in my neighborhood or whatever. But they're super

warm and friendly. And so of course I want to go buy my banana from that person and support the really local, local person, the person on my block that's on my corner and selling bananas. That's who I want to buy my bananas from rather than the grocery store. And so, the more local I think you can get, the better it is. But also, then you build that rapport with those local vendors that are like, oh, that's that guy. He lives on my block. He runs by here every day. He buys his bananas from me. Like, how you doing? Nice to see you. Because you know the local vendors, you know the people in your neighborhood, and they know you. And that's such a. A rich and nice feeling travel experience for me at least.

**Priyanka Surio:** I completely agree. And they'll look out for you too, because they want you to be a loyal customer to them. And so, I have this hair stylist in Ghana, in Accra, on my street, and I'll always let her know when I'm in town. And then she's like, I have a spot for you whenever you want to come in. This time is really good or open. And so, she's already anticipating and waiting and creating space for me. And so that's so powerful. And I think even with the street vendor, they probably save you the best bananas. Like, oh, this is my regular. I want to make sure that they get the best produce that I have to offer.

And I'm really into budget travel mostly because I think it's just wise to budget anyways. Not just because I'm trying to be resourceful, but because I want my dollar to go farther. I want to be able to use it for many other places. I want to be able to travel, sustain that lifestyle. So, I love to budget travel. And those street vendors, they tend to be a lot cheaper than the grocery store, which sometimes can hike their prices up. So, I learned that as well. And that negotiation piece, that's something that I learned when I was in India. And I learned that it's very Indian as well to negotiate. And so, when I go, I will always negotiate. And I tell people when they're kind of giving me that look, I'm like, this is Indian. This is part of my culture. We negotiate all the time; is how we get to know each other. And people will laugh and then I'll usually get the deal.

**Matt Bowles:** That's so amazing. It's so fun. And it's such a really enjoyable piece of the cultural immersion. You end up having such fun with the people you're negotiating with. So, I love building rapport that way. Priyanka, I also want to talk to you about activism. Specifically, you wrote an article called Travel as Activism. And before we get into that, I would love to just talk about some background of your activist journey. At the beginning of this conversation, you talked about growing up and when you were very young, becoming very aware, based on your personal experiences, of the racial power hierarchy, dynamics of white supremacy, of class inequality, and really coming up against that and becoming aware of that.

And then I know when you got to Washington, D.C. you were living there during the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, after the police lynching of George Floyd, and you were on the front lines of some of those protests. And I'm wondering if you can just share a little bit about your activist journey and just give folks a little bit of that background before your Nomad era, and maybe even share some specific experiences in D.C. I know you were actually at that Lafayette Square protest that got international media coverage. And I'm wondering if you can just share some of those experiences and your lessons from that work.

**Priyanka Surio:** Activism is not only personal to me, but it's also something that as you become a sustainable or regenerative traveler, you are also being an activist for certain causes, for certain communities, for certain people. And so, I very much think of travel as activism, as a way to carry out that sustainable or regenerative travel style, because it is different. It is decolonizing. And so, I like to complete those two as part of the same coin, if you will. But personally, yes, I grew up, obviously, with lots of racism and ignorance. And I think there's some important lessons to share as it comes to activism that people can maybe take some lessons away from. And one of those is understanding when you are dealing with all of

these different things that are uncomfortable or that feel unsafe or dangerous to you. Finding solitude and safe space and sanctuary. I know that was so important to me growing up when I didn't even have agency or know what I could do. But to know that I could lean into certain spaces and find safety there when I was dealing with certain things like racial profiling or being pulled over with my friends or dealing with someone who was angry and calling us slurs and not knowing where that would escalate, having that community of people to talk it through, to feel safe around, to vent about the experience, was so important.

And I think the other piece is knowing that I was not black or Hispanic, even though I was profiled that way. I had something else I could say that I wasn't that. That was my privilege. So, I think part of activism work is understanding where your privileges are. And that's why I wanted to leverage travel as activism, because travel is an immense privilege, and yet it's something that has the power to really change the world because you are going into so many spaces and places, you are being introduced and around so many different people. And so, it has so much power because of that. And so going back to that, understanding your privileges and understanding how you can decolonize your own mind, put your privileges to the side, put your pride to the side and understand and put yourself in the shoes of people who don't have those privileges.

And the way that you do that, because we always talk about this saying, put yourself in other people's shoes, but how do we do that? We do that by listening and listening with empathy. We listen for understanding. We don't try to put our own judgments or force our own thoughts about why something happened or why they made the choices they did. There's so much complexity as to why people who are in these very depressed and racist places make certain choices out of survival, out of necessity, out of not having any other option, of not knowing any better. I think part of it is just being very open to listening to that story and listening to it without challenging it, really having the empathy. You went through that, and I see you and I hear you and I empathize with you, and I want to care for you. And so those were two things that I just learned growing up, and those were the things that I was able to do. Now we moved to D.C. where I wanted to come and be a change maker and get involved and have a seat at the table.

And so that was my intention when I moved to D.C. and I was getting involved in health and social justice work was to have a change and to be able to have that ripple effect across the Nation. I knew D.C. was a place that set the tone for the rest of the country, and I wanted to be at that table. And I learned some very hard lessons about being at that table where sometimes my voice was dismissed or there was a ceiling and I hit it, or where other people's voices who were not BIPOC would get elevated. And their ideas, maybe they were my ideas originally, but they would be repositioned as those people's ideas, and they would be elevated to those platforms. And it was a very hard truth to face. But even in that, I found that you want to have one, a seat at the table, always. Your presence, by its very nature helps disrupt these things and help disrupt the certain thinking. So even if you are in these spaces where it doesn't feel comfortable or you're not being considered, your very presence in and of itself is trailblazing the path for other people to come.

And I realize the importance of that in talking with mentors and talking with people in the community, even in talking with people back home in Florida, they're like, you being there is so important. It's so important because of what we know you saw and witnessed of our lives and your own life, and it's so important that you're there. The second thing is DC's culture is activism. People are very politically active. People want to be involved. They're very conscious. And it helped me up my own game of different issues, not just within the us, but also abroad. I came to know about different issues happening in Palestine, such as the forced ethnic cleansing, the Nakba, and then later on, the genocidal things that have happened. It helped me

understand some of the things that were happening in Congo in terms of the extraction of resources and the child labor that was happening there because of these big capitalistic global companies. And so, I learned these things very early on, and I also learned them through being very active.

So, there were often certain demonstrations, marches that I would participate in, and not all of them were so serious. Some of them were really fun. You would have artists come and do dances and poetry and music. And so, activism can be artivism, which is the mixture of art and activism. And it can be a very powerful way to own the narrative, to have agency over your story and to move people to action. And that is really the tapestry of what I've gone through within my own activism story. I think if we go into the BLM movement specifically, and that night, there was both that piece of organizing and collectivism, as well as trauma that we face. And so, I think that in particular was a very pivotal moment of where I ended up just going on a jog around DC, and I'd heard that protests might be happening or marches might be happening because of George Floyd's death. This was maybe a couple days after his death, and things were already happening in Minnesota. And so, things may have been happening in DC, but I wasn't too aware of them. It was during COVID we were all messed up.

There were certainly restrictions, and so I wasn't sure if I would participate, but I ended up running to the place where some of that was happening, near Lafayette Square, in front of the White House. And you know what I saw? I saw young people. I saw young black and brown and white people, 18 years old, 12 years old. And then I saw some people who were a little bit older as well. But my first thought was, oh, my gosh, these are kids and they're out here, and they were just trying for a better world. And I need to be here with them, and I need to be in solidarity with them. And I also need to be in solidarity for this movement. I mean, I know what that's about. I've seen people go through this racial profiling and the fact that it resulted in a man's death. Yeah, enough is enough. And so, I was moved to be part of this group. And we were there for several hours, but we experienced police brutality. We experienced being beaten, pepper sprayed, gassed with masks on. Most of us were masked up, and we were being sprayed.

And I remember this young black woman, and she splashed some milk in my eyes because they were filled with pepper spray, says, this will help you. And so, we're all trying to help each other as we're dealing with this very traumatizing moment. And, you know, I had to recuperate and recover. And then I went out again a couple days later, and wound up being cuddled by police, which means you're basically blocked and you cannot escape. And then they use that to basically arrest you, to beat you, to inflict their brutality. And I just thought it was so wild. Like, why are they doing this? We're all going through a hard time. Why are they inflicting more brutality? The very thing that we are protesting against, I mean, it was very dangerous, for sure. I definitely had family very worried about me. At the same time, I felt, wow, this is what black people go through every day. The fear that they're going to be beaten, the fear that they're going to get killed.

And I'm literally in this position now just for simply protesting and using my First Amendment right. They live this daily. And so that really made that reality come to life. We were arrested. We were arrested without being given access to car people. And all of it was just wrong. And all of it made me very angry and very mad and very much wanting to do things. But I'll end this story by saying we were able to be part of this lawsuit, and it was against that police department that had inflicted the brutality to us as peaceful protesters. And we actually won. And so I know you mentioned that international coverage, and it definitely had international coverage, but there's also these smaller wins of protesters or marchers or demonstrators or the families that dealt with their dead loved ones, like Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, they were still

advocating for justice for that. And there are small wins, but there's still so much more to do. And that's why I'll forever be an activist.

**Matt Bowles:** So how did that experience shape your activism moving forward? And how did you eventually start merging it with travel?

**Priyanka Surio:** When we were in Lafayette Square a couple days later, because of what had happened, the mayor created a Black Lives Matter Plaza. And unfortunately, it's been removed now, but the place still remains where they basically reconstructed that area to be an open place for black pride and joy and resistance. And so, one of the first things I did when I traveled abroad again, and even to other cities across the U.S., I visited the Black Lives Matter Plaza in these places. Because what movement sparked in D.C. about creating this plaza, about remembering and embracing this and actually having a place ended up trickling to other places all around the globe. And so, I would visit these places, and what was really cool is by visiting some of these other Black Lives Matter plazas, you will then be touched and tapped into the local people, the local economies, black owned businesses, some of the cultures, some of the art. There would be shows or demonstrations or a poet activist would show up.

And so, it was really cool to actually be there and to see how the community coalesced around this shared space. And remember when I first mentioned about activism being about having a sanctuary, having a place where you can be safe when you are experiencing this? And so those plazas represented that well. Then in places that didn't have that, I sought out those places. Where are the places where people are able to speak freely, where they feel safe, where they feel in sanctuary. And usually that's a very local place that is a more undercover place, that is a place where people can feel more open. And again, you have to be invited or you have to be accepted to be in that space. And so that was part of that as well. And from those moments, I'd build a rapport with those people who are in those spaces. I learn about all the amazing work that they might be doing or the ways that they are advocating or demonstrating or protesting or whatever they might be doing for their local people. And it ranges the gamut.

Some people are protesting against climate change in Bangladesh or in Pakistan because they're literally dealing with flooding and the extreme events that they're facing. And so then being able to have a conversation with these people and be invited to promote awareness for what they're dealing with. And maybe there's a way I can help or I can invest, or I can share their story with other people as well. And so, this opened the door for me to be very action oriented to the people I had met who are on the ground making the change. They are the change makers. I think the other space that was pretty cool to explore was actually the entrepreneurial and startup space, especially because of that early exposure to social impact work in India. I would often seek out those spaces, particularly the founders who were doing more social impact work or work that was benefiting a large amount of people. And it was really interesting to have those conversations because in many ways, some of the things that they were building was actually fueling their local place, whether it was the economy, whether it was the people, whether it was building back.

And I remember a really particular experience that was so beautiful. It was in Medellin, in Comuna 13, which used to be a guerrilla zone. And it was interesting to go and see this through the eyes of our tour guide, who basically introduced us to all the little local arts studios, who introduced us to all the entrepreneurs in that space, who showed us all of the different demonstrations and artists and dancers. And during each part of that tour, we were able to purchase goods or give back or donate. And I definitely did because it was such an honor to be able to be here and to hear their story of how despite how

dangerous it was and despite. Despite their troubled history, they were able to build back, better be resilient. And their resilience was their resistance and then turn this war zone into a cultural hub.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah, Comuna 13 is a place that people should definitely visit. And I think that's another place that is really important for people to do the historical research, especially if you're coming from the United States. Because one of the things that Americans should know about going there is that that the United States for many years was backing very repressive Colombian regime that was committing extreme human rights abuses. And one of the human rights abuses that was committed was called Operation Orion, when they sent in paramilitary forces flanking government forces and they just massacred people in Comuna 13. And so that was a government sponsored U.S. backed massacre that happened in that community. And so, when you go there, it's important to understand that. But what's amazing is exactly what you said, which ties in with one of your themes about *Resilience*, of how the community rebuilt itself.

And one of the things that was so close to my heart about that community is that they rebuilt that community on the pillars of hip hop culture. And so you can go to the Kolacho Hip-Hop Community center at the base of Comuna 13, and you will see that all of the kids in the neighborhood, starting at the age of five, get breakdancing lessons and emcee and DJ lessons, and the whole community is done up with street art and all of this stuff. And it's really amazing how they have reclaimed and rebuilt that community on the pillars of hip hop culture and now, as you said, has become this internationally iconic cultural and artistic hub that everyone goes to, and everyone should go there. But it's important to going back to what we were talking about, about how some of this stuff starts to get into this narrative where it's such a popular tourist thing that sometimes they start to whitewash some of the narratives about what actually happened to make it more appealing to tourists. So, they're not necessarily making tourists from places like the United States feeling uncomfortable.

And this is the same kind of stuff that you'll see if you go. We talked about Johannesburg, right. If you go to the townships in Johannesburg to learn about the history of apartheid, the ironic part about the political economy of this type of tourism is that if you're selling tours to majority white folks from Western societies with money that are coming there to learn about this, there's sort of this economic incentive built in to not make your customers feel too uncomfortable about the history of what actually happened there. So, there's a little bit of this potential to start whitewashing some of the actual history for financially incentivized reasons based on who your customer base is, as those types of things start to become bigger and bigger and bigger tourist attractions and attracting that kind of people. Which circles back to exactly what we were talking about in the beginning of your formula about doing that research about all those dynamics so you're as informed as possible when you go into these places.

And I think it's also about being actually interested in, well, number one, the history, but number two, the communities that are actually being marginalized and oppressed and that are in struggle today. Like which groups in this place that I'm going to be marginalized today and have a struggle today. How can I learn about that? Because those are usually the things, again, that are going to be glossed over in the larger tourism narrative because they're going to be trying to sell a tour to people that are going to be paying for it, and they're going to give them a particular narrative. And that narrative will usually exclude the struggles of marginalized groups. And so, you need to make an extra effort and to be actually interested in learning that and understanding that. And of course, as you travel the world, you understand that every single society and every single country has all sorts of stratification dynamics and political and social and economic inequality dynamics and so forth. And are you interested in that, and are you interested in learning about

that and then being in solidarity with those particular communities that are marginalized in the various different places that you're going to?

**Priyanka Surio:** And I think that's where the activism plays a role. That's where anti-racism plays a role. Like obviously you're in your home country and you're discriminating or being racist against a certain people, you're probably going to carry it out with you abroad. So, part of this is understanding where can you dismantle those privileges and those misconceptions about people at home and then also abroad. And I think people have very much nuanced feelings about that. People may have a stereotype again, what they expect to see out of people, what they think they've seen, what the Western media or narrative or movies have shown. But then when you actually go to a place, you realize how much is not true. And there's actually one piece that I would say is probably the most glaring about this, and its danger. How people talk about danger or talk about travel as dangerous or certain places as dangerous.

I've often heard when I'm traveling to a certain place, oh, you shouldn't go there, it's so dangerous. The people are not good, they're not friendly. It'll be dangerous for you. And I do not feel that there. And then that post will say it about another place, oh, that place that's dangerous, or how can you be there? It's dangerous. And it's so interesting because where I felt the most in danger is actually in America, not in these other places. And so often I go with that. Well, actually I have felt in danger before and it's at home, not in your country, not in this country. And so, I actually challenge people to think about the danger that often gets promoted in these narratives about a place and visit and see for yourself.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part two. If you would like to learn more about Priyanka's Four Sustainable Travel Mindsets and Four World Changing Forces that we have been discussing in this episode, if you'd like to go deeper and learn how you can implement them into your travels, I highly recommend checking out both of her books. We are going to link them up in [the show notes](#) along with everything else that we have discussed in this episode and all the ways that you can find, follow and connect with Priyanka. That is all going to be at [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com). Just 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 Priyanka Surio. Good night, everybody.