

Emily Kumler: I'm Emily Kumler and this is Empowered Health. [Last week on Empowered Health](#)¹, we talked to [Jessica Nabongo](#)², who is the first African American³ woman to have ever traveled to every single country in the world. And Jessica and I talked about a lot of stuff, including sort of geopolitical stuff, and like what to know when you travel and also sort of why traveling and seeing lots of different places is really great for you and we should probably all be traveling more. And since it's the holidays, we probably do have some travel plans or people traveling to us. And so this week we wanted to dive into the topic a little bit deeper in a different way. Our first guest is going to talk to us about what it's like to love to travel so much that you kind of decide to live a nomadic lifestyle. Diana Edelman is somebody who has traveled to different places, liked them so much that she's decided to stay, in some cases for years. But, we also talk a lot about what does it mean when you're traveling from place to place and the sort of excitement or the novelty of it being new wears off? And then what is it like to come home when your home has become sort of the world? And what are the pros and cons of sort of an [expat lifestyle](#)⁴ versus the sort of Jessica vacation style travel? And what should people think when they're, you know, considering moving to a new country? And then finally, one of the things that Diana and I talk about, which I've actually thought a lot about since the interview ended, was this idea of running away versus traveling. And that sometimes when we feel depressed or anxious or lonely or stuck, right, whether it's your career or something with your family or a relationship you're in, we have this need to get away, right? And when you go to a new place, everything feels better and it tastes better. And, you know, you sort of feel happier and there aren't any obligations. My husband often jokes that he wishes that we could just be on vacation all the time because I don't ask him to do things, which is obviously unrealistic but it gets to a point of something, right, which is we all have this need to escape our own lives sometimes. And that's fine as long as it doesn't turn into something where you're just on the run. And Diana does a really great job of talking to us about her realization that she was sort of on the run.

Diana Edelman: Hi, I'm [Diana Edelman](#)⁵ and I am a travel blogger and run [vegansbaby.com](#)⁶.

Emily Kumler: So, I have known you for a long time. When you and I were both sort of starting out and we were living in Las Vegas, and I was

¹ <https://empoweredhealthshow.com/female-travel-tourism-jessica-nabongo/>

² <https://www.instagram.com/thecatchmeifyoucan/?hl=en>

³ Jessica identifies as an American African.

⁴ <https://www.internations.org/guide/global/what-s-an-expat-anyway-15272>

⁵ <https://vegansbaby.com/about/>

⁶ <https://vegansbaby.com/>

working as a reporter and you were working as a publicist, and we fast became good drinking buddies. Shortly after I left Vegas for New York, you left on like a world expedition and I like have always been so jealous of your, not just like your chutzpah or whatever you would call it to like just get up and go, but also like how you really made a life for yourself in these other places. And so I think what's really sort of a great place for us to start is why did you decide to take that trip and how long were you gone for, you know, sort of, what was that all about?

Diana Edelman: I decided to take the trip because I was in a place in my life where I was turning 30. And I had left Las Vegas and relocated to Atlanta for a job, thinking it was going to help grow my career. But it ended up being a job I really just did not enjoy. It just wasn't a match for me. So for my 30th birthday, I went to [Croatia](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/croatia)⁷ for 10 days by myself. And prior to that, I had traveled, but it wasn't a whole lot. When I graduated college, I went to Europe for a month and went backpacking by myself. And it was really cool, you know, but that was like, at that point, it was like 15 years ago. So I was in Croatia, and when I was there I just kind of realized that I was really unhappy and that I didn't want to be unhappy any longer and I found such peace and joy and being out in the world and waking up and just not knowing what was going to happen. When I got back from that trip, I just was like, huh, I'm not sure what to do with my life anymore because it really threw me for a loop. I've always been brought up being, you have to go, go, go work, work, work, have a career, retire, and then you go travel. I was kind of like, oh, well I'm having a 30 life crisis. So, I ended up quitting my job, putting all my life in storage. I gave notice in January for a month and I booked a trip that day. And I booked the trip from March until September 2010. So I was gone for just about seven months, by myself, [blogging](https://dtravelsround.com/)⁸ the whole time about my experience being a solo female traveler. And I went through a good chunk of Europe and a little bit of Africa along the way.

Emily Kumler: One of the things that I love about that story is that it feels very impulsive, but it's also not really impulsive. I feel like when I heard you were doing it, I wasn't even a little surprised. You know what I mean? And so I'm sort of curious like when you were in Croatia, was it like sort of the juxtaposition or the contrast of like how you felt on the open road versus how you had been feeling at work or like was it something else that was ignited in you when you were away?

Diana Edelman: I was in Croatia for 10 days and about a little more than halfway through the trip, I met this guy at a hostel in [Split](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/croatia/dalmatia/split)⁹, really good guy, and

⁷ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/croatia>

⁸ <https://dtravelsround.com/>

⁹ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/croatia/dalmatia/split>

we ended up like going to the beach the next day and he was a little younger than me, but had spent a lot of his time volunteering around the world and traveling. And now he was working at this hostel for an undetermined amount of time. And we sat there that day, just talking about life and he's like, you know, I don't want to look back. Like I had that white picket fence but I didn't live. I really want to like, I want to know that like when I'm old and I have grandkids and I'm living my old life, like that I lived when I was growing up and my like my whole life I lived. And I was like, oh, okay. Like I'm in a job that is terrible. It's just wash, rinse, repeat. And I was like, I want to live like that. I don't want to be that person that's like 80 years old and is like, oh yeah, I worked my whole life and I had the white picket fence, and I had a nice car, and I had a family, but I didn't do anything. That was the catalyst for it. And then starting the travel blog obviously was like, well now I've started it, now I have to go. So, that was that.

Diana Edelman: And how did you fund that first three months? So I am a very lucky, very privileged person, and I realize that. And my parents helped me out. I worked the whole time I was traveling, I had work freelance writing and stuff like that, but they helped me with the cost. And I was very mindful of like expenses, you know when you travel. And at 30, you can still stay in a dorm room and it's cool and it's not so bad like sleeping with 20 other people. So, I just budgeted everything and was just very cautious or cognizant of my money. And you came home and how long were you home for before you left again? I came back September 2010 and I moved to [Thailand](#)¹⁰ July 2012. You know, I knew when I got back that I needed a job, but really I was getting a job because I wanted to go back and travel more. That was my goal. I wanted to get out. I did not want to be in America. I did not want to live here. I just wanted a means to an end so I could leave again. I should also point out that during all of this time, like I was really depressed and I thought traveling would make my life happy and better. So I was running. So I came back, and I got a part time job with a restaurant group that I had done PR for the last time I was in Vegas. I spent like a year and a half there. The summer before I left to move to Thailand, I went to Thailand for a trip, fell in love with the country, and the organization I eventually ended up working for. And when I came home, like, I'd never been to Southeast Asia. The jet lag you get your first time coming back from Southeast Asia is mind boggling. It destroys you. Like you cannot think straight for like a week. So I came back to work, and I missed like a spelling error on a menu or something and they're like, is this what it is when you travel? You can never travel again. And I'm like, oh, well, you literally just told a travel blogger you can never travel again. So I was like, okay, we're done. So that was that. I stayed until I had the

¹⁰ <https://www.tourismthailand.org/>

offer to go to Thailand and as soon as I had the offer I put in my notice and just started getting ready to move to Thailand.

Emily Kumler: And then how long were you there?

Diana Edelman: I was in Thailand for two and a half years.

Emily Kumler: And what was that like?

Diana Edelman: I was living in Northern Thailand in a city called [Chiang Mai](#)¹¹. It's the second biggest city in Thailand, and I spent most of my time in the city. On occasion, I would go to the [elephant sanctuary](#)¹² and then on even rarer occasions I would go out in the fields and go on like undercover investigations and educational trips to really learn and see how elephants are treated that we don't see. So I saw elephants in Myanmar being trained for the circus, which is a terrible thing. I saw elephants getting like roped up to go through the crush, which is like their spirit breaking. I saw a lot. And that was very, very difficult, you know, especially coming in because as I said, like I was still running, I hadn't really like found myself but thought I was like on the path. So Thailand, for the first bit, was absolutely incredible. Like waking up every day to roosters, and like the smell of incense, and the [tuk-tuks](#)¹³ driving by, and the monks, and I was just like on cloud nine it was amazing. Every day was a new day and it was great. But then, after a while, you start to realize there are some huge cultural differences. It's very difficult to adapt to them and to be a part of the Thai culture. Like I had a really hard time because I am not a soft spoken person. I'm a strong woman and so it was very hard for me to reign that in. I'm expressive, I'm emotive and like people don't really do that there. So that was challenging. Being a Western woman was challenging just because, especially for dating, like you couldn't, it was almost impossible to date there because the men coming to Thailand wanted to like date Thai women and the Thai men don't want to really date the Western women. So it was like, okay, I'm just, I'm going to be single forever here and that's okay. Like, I'm good with it. And then I just started to not be good with any of it. I just got really tired, you know, I got tired of having to rely on tuk-tuks and things to get me back and forth. Like I didn't have the independence that I wanted, that I needed. It was all reliant on other people and other things. And so, I was with my friend one day and I just come back from London, and he was like, Diana, you have to leave Chiang Mai before you hate it. And I was like, okay, you know, I realized that I needed to go because I didn't want to hate the city. I didn't want to hate my experience there. I didn't want to become bitter. I should also point out another really big challenge living

¹¹ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thailand/chiang-mai-province/chiang-mai>

¹² <https://dtravelsround.com/2015/08/11/truth-about-riding-elephants-in-thailand/>

¹³ <https://www.asiahighlights.com/thailand/tuk-tuks.htm>

living in Chang Mai was that it was a very transient place. Think Las Vegas, but 20 million times worse. So people would come, you know, they'd come for a month and you'd get to know them and then they'd leave. They'd come for three months and then they'd leave. They would be here for a year and you'd have like an amazing relationship with the person and then they go back to their home country. So there wasn't a lot of permanence and I really, really wanted permanence. I wanted to hang things on my walls. I wanted friendships that were long lasting that I could count on.

Emily Kumler: Well, and I think what's so interesting is like this, the idea that when you're traveling, it kind of opens your soul in this way, but that after a certain period of time, like the novelty of it wears off and the reality of life, right? Which in that case is like, okay, I can't be as independent as I want, or I really miss friends. I can remember when I went to high school for a year in Italy, and, which you know of some of this, I remember being like out at a bar and there were like a bunch of Marines and I was like, oh my God, I'm going to go hang out with them. And I spent the whole night hanging out with them and they thought I was like hysterical because they were like based, you know, in [Sicily](#)¹⁴ or something. And they were like up in Rome for the weekend. And I was just like, I need like big, rough American men who can be sarcastic and like, you know, treat me like their little sister. Right? And you know, I was young, right. And they were older than I was, whatever. And it wasn't inappropriate in any way, but like it was sort of one of those things where it was like, I just culturally, was like desperate for a dose of America in a way that like, I hadn't ever thought of. Right? Like I hadn't, as an American girl growing up here, hadn't ever thought like, oh these are the things that I love about this country. I had to leave in order to recognize those things. That and like Reese's peanut butter cups, which you can't get anywhere else.

Diana Edelman: Oh. Yeah, peanut butter you can't get. It costs so much money to get peanut butter everywhere in the world. It's so true what you're saying about like the cultural, like missing your culture. I never thought I would. Like when I left, like, bye. I'm like, I'm not coming back. I'll come back to visit. But like I am never living back in the States like I am done. I'm over it. And then you know, two years later I'm like, oh man, I really miss it. Because I never thought I would. But you do.

Emily Kumler: And you start seeing the place that you're in if you're there for, I mean like this is what's interesting about travel, right? Because you drop into a place for like a week or maybe a couple of days and you're like, wow, this is amazing. Like everything seems perfect. But then when you live there, you realize like there are these differences, which you know, may not be

¹⁴ <http://www.italia.it/en/discover-italy/sicily.html>

terrible, but they're different and you either like them or you don't. Yeah. I feel like the prolonged stay is such a very different experience than, you know, just sort of going someplace on a vacation.

Diana Edelman: Yeah. And everywhere you go, there you are. So if you're miserable in an old life, chances are you're going to be miserable in your new life. It's just going to take a little bit to set in because you're on your honeymoon, you know?

Emily Kumler: Right, right. You know, that's interesting because I feel like when you think about [depression](#)¹⁵ too, a lot of it has to do with sort of the routine or the feeling stuck. Right? Whether it's chemically or whether it's like environmental, I mean, I feel like in some ways it's kind of both of those things often. And the idea that like sort of running around or being in new places where like all of your senses are taking in information, certainly like overloads you, right? And like, you feel exhausted. And then you're not thinking about like the, you know, break up you had or the parent you lost or like whatever it is that might have been the underlying reason for why you were feeling so sad before. And so when that all finally caught up with you, did that make you feel like you needed to sort of sit with it back at home? How did you face that?

Diana Edelman: No. I, you know, I feel like once you're in that rut, you're in that rut and it's really hard to get out of. Like I said, I left Thailand and I ended up moving to [London](#)¹⁶ and I lived in London for a couple of months and you know, London or the UK really doesn't want you to stay there. And at that point, I wasn't ready to come home yet. So I moved to [Madrid](#)¹⁷. The first time I'd been to Madrid, when I took my like long-term trip, I immediately fell in love with the city. I was like, I'm going to live here one day. Madrid is amazing. And so I moved to Madrid. And it's so true, you know, the honeymoon, you're there, you love it, it's sparkly. And then you live there and you're like, oh God, what have I done? Madrid was very challenging for me because I was in such a bad place. I finally was like, okay, I can't live like this. Like, I need to figure out my life. I need to know which direction I'm going. I need to like have peace with myself. So I actually reached out to my therapist who I used to go to in Vegas before I moved to Thailand and we started Skype sessions. She really helped me kind of work through a lot of stuff while I was living in Madrid. And then finally I just realized, I'm like, you know what, I'm just, it's not necessarily an issue of just being depressed, I just don't like it here. I'm lonely. I don't want to keep jumping through hoops and through hurdles to live as an expat, like it's difficult to get visas. It's really hard. And I was just like, I just want to not feel like there's

¹⁵ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/London>

¹⁷ https://www.spain.info/en_US/que-quieres/ciudades-pueblos/grandes-ciudades/madrid.html

always something weighing me down because for four years I felt like I just had this huge weight on my shoulders because I knew nothing was permanent. And I really wanted permanent. And so that's when I decided that, you know, I was like, you know what, I don't need to define myself as an expat anymore. I don't need to define myself as a travel blogger traveling the world anymore. I just kind of want to be Diana. And so I moved back to Vegas and that's what I did.

Emily Kumler: Now the other piece of traveling a lot, that I think we all think about probably especially as women, is the idea of security and safety. In some ways that doesn't matter whether you're interested in an expat lifestyle or living abroad for your junior year in college or you've got a job that's going to take you overseas for a few years or you want to travel someplace by yourself. And you've heard mixed things about how women are treated or the safety involved. And when we talked to Jessica last week, she made the point that like a lot of times the places that Americans are told to be the scariest of are actually the places that are the safest towards women. So they might not be great places for women to live in terms of career opportunity or equality. But, as a female traveler you are often pretty safe. You know, in talking to Diana, she sort of had these good guidelines about how like you know, you probably will get taken advantage of and you probably should just get used to that and how to sort of think about it. But, I wanted to talk to somebody who was a real expert in terms of security risks abroad, specifically for women, and specifically for female travelers. So our next guest is a very old friend of mine who has worked in intelligence and doing really interesting things abroad, and she's going to break down for us some things that women should probably consider. And also some really great resources that you can look up, places you'd like to visit or places that you know you're going to visit, and take the necessary precautions. So here is Erika.

Erika Weisbrod: My name is [Erika Weisbrod](#)¹⁸ and I am the Director of Security Solutions for a company called [International SOS](#)¹⁹. I work in the field of travel risk management and providing security assistance and advice to support international organizations that send their workforce abroad. It is very in line with my personal interests as well in travel. I started traveling when I was a kid and got interested in international relations. So my background academically is in Russian studies and international relations. I did my study abroad program in college in Russia. I ended up working for the government for almost 11 years as an intelligence analyst and that sent me abroad, as well. I spent over four years

¹⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/erika-weisbrod-3b944b45/detail/recent-activity/>

¹⁹ <https://www.internationalsos.com/>

living in the Czech Republic, living in [Prague](#)²⁰, which was an amazing experience.

Emily Kumler: I feel like that's so bad ass. I'm so excited to talk to you and to be able to call you a friend. I feel like that's really amazing. And I think one of the things that I'm really excited about having you on the podcast is because a lot of the work you do is for like, whether it's governments or big corporations. And so individual women who are traveling around may not even have access to the kind of advice that you're going to be hopefully giving us. So, it seems like [more women are traveling solo](#)²¹ now than maybe ever before. And I'm sort of curious in terms of a both risk, like sort of risk perspective on that, as well as, you know, sort of just talking a little bit about like women deciding to go on trips by themselves. I mean, as a little bit of background, I literally just got back from [two weeks](#)²² [in Peru](#)²³ [traveling all around](#)²⁴ by myself and my mom was like, what are you doing? You know what I mean? I feel like there's definitely a strong reaction, whereas my girlfriends were all like, oh, this is awesome, you know, like go girl. An even that generational difference seems significant to me.

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah, absolutely. And that trip sounds fantastic. I bet it was. And I would have been in the same camp as your friends, saying, wow, that sounds amazing. Go girl, go take advantage of that opportunity. And I think we're seeing more women traveling in general and then seeing more female travel where they're doing it solo. You know, some of this may be based on kind of innate female curiosity to explore and understand the world. But I think it's also linked to, as you said, it's generational. It's linked to the evolution of the independent woman. Increasing opportunities for women to pursue what their male counterparts have. And we see this as they take on more responsibility and in their career, which also leads to having more disposable income and increased access to be able to take both time and the money to go and be adventurous and see the world.

Emily Kumler: That idea of it sort of like being inspirational and then tangible in the sense like, oh, I have the money, or I could take the time off, or I don't have a vacation planned makes a lot of sense. Will you just explain to us a little bit about like when you are evaluating the security risks, like in your professional life, and you're sort of using the tools that you, as somebody who's traveled a lot, have like sort of learned on the ground, what does it look like to

²⁰ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/czech-republic/prague>

²¹ <https://solotravelerworld.com/about/solo-travel-statistics-data/>

²² <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0DqjvpBuKF/>

²³ <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0I2738hr0A/>

²⁴ https://www.instagram.com/p/Bz_O-6hhl4H/

go in and evaluate, let's say a country or a city or something like that? Like how do you even begin that process?

Erika Weisbrod: Really it starts off when you're planning your trip and you're understanding even, you know, is this a destination that I'd want to go to? What are the risks in that location? The way we approach it at International SOS from a risk management standpoint, we're trying to enable travel, so understanding not just what those risks are, but then what needs to be done to mitigate those risks to achieve a level of comfort? And especially if you're conducting personal travel, that level of comfort is going to really vary based on the traveler personality or the traveler experience. Maybe the traveler speaks the language of the country that they're going to and they're going to have greater comfort in traveling throughout those places, asking for directions, reading road signs. There are a lot of factors that need to be considered when researching a destination. Once you understand is the primary risk petty and opportunistic crime? Is the primary risk related to medical or health conditions? Then can you actually do something to prepare for that destination or know how you will respond in a situation in that country if something happens? If you do get sick, if you do get hurt, if there is a natural disaster, really a lot of that's on the research side. And the other key thing to factor in, we read a lot of media that can be sensationalized about kind of uptick in crime or kidnap in a destination. What's really key as you evaluate a destination is to understand what is that risk pertaining to your profile? It could be your profile as a foreigner. So there are certain risks that you read about the kidnap risk in Mexico, which is much greater for local Mexican nationals than it might be for a foreign national. So what is the actual risk for foreigners traveling in Mexico versus someone who is a local and has the day to day risks different than a traveler.

Emily Kumler: And so for somebody who's like not in the business, I mean like I'll use Peru as an example. I feel like I always look at the [state department website](#)²⁵ before I travel. Right? And they have warnings all through Peru about terrorist attacks, but those attacks are mostly focused on government buildings. Right? The places that I was not planning to go at all. It seems like a lot of the touristy places are actually really, really safe, but I sort of had to do some due diligence in order to distill that down. You know, I think the state department is a great resource. Are there other places that you generally like people to go check out when they're thinking about planning a trip?

Erika Weisbrod: Due diligence is exactly the right word. It sounds like you did the right thing. The state department is a great, accessible resource for everyone. And when I say everyone, it is available to everyone. It is directly

²⁵ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

relevant to U.S. citizens. So you also need to factor in, you know, if you are another nationality, are you going to your country's resource page? Even as a U.S. national, you can cross reference other government's sites. The [UK's foreign commonwealth office](#)²⁶ publishes information, so you can kind of cross reference and see is the state department pretty much saying the same thing as the UK? And so those are important resources. Again, there might be information that varies. The U.S. is going to focus on U.S. interests. So, if you're traveling with a French friend or a Japanese friend, all of that might not be directly relevant. It still will be a good resource. At International SOS we do our own kind of risk ratings, travel alerts, travel assessments, and provide access to security subject matter experts as well as medical subject matter experts to get that level of information. If you don't have access to a travel risk management or assistance provider, you can also talk to, I think people overlook some of the medical risks, you can talk to a [travel doctor](#)²⁷. Make sure you go to a travel clinic so that you're addressing the relevant risks and the location where you're traveling. So understanding the vaccinations you need before you go, what kind of medications you may want to bring with you. Maybe what kind of medications you're not allowed to bring with you. So in some countries it's actually illegal or banned to bring certain medications in and you could run into trouble trying to cross the border, going through the airport. So that sort of advice is also really key. Understanding the standard of the medical facilities in the country you're going to, can you receive a certain level of medical care? And then that other plan is if you can't, do you have travel insurance in place to be able to support a movement if you require some sort of medical evacuation to receive care in a country that has better standards of care.

Emily Kumler: That's actually a really good point to just stay on for a minute because I think every time you book a flight abroad, you're asked basically, whether it's like [Orbitz](#)²⁸ or like through a travel agent, like do you want evacuation insurance? Like my parents just got back from Russia and they, you know, whoever it was that arranged for their trip, was like trying to encourage them that they should get this like medical evacuation coverage. There's a part of me that feels like that seems crazy. I mean I could see like if you were going someplace where it was like, I don't know, like tsunami season, right? Or something. But I also sort of feel like if you're really in a dire situation, you're going to take whatever medical care can get there fastest. Right? So like some of that must be kind of a racket. I mean, I'm sure some of it is worthwhile, but how would you advise somebody to distinguish between, you know what is sort of like I go and buy a set of batteries at CVS and I'm asked if I want like a

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>

²⁷ https://www.istm.org/AF_CstmClinicDirectory.asp

²⁸ <https://www.orbitz.com/>

product guarantee insurance for the next year. Right? Versus something that's actually really good bang for your buck.

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah, and I'm not an expert in the travel insurance space, but it is important to see what's covered in that travel insurance. The reasons that it can be triggered or activated up to what cost would they cover an evacuation? Some cover only medical evacuation, some cover evacuations that are related to security. It could be political unrest, it could be natural disaster, severe weather. I mean some of it, you know, you're like, okay, am I just covering the costs of, you know, lost luggage or you know, the cost of a medical evacuation can be tens of thousands of dollars if not over hundreds of thousands of dollars depending on how they need to transport you, where they need to transport you. And so really looking into what that level of coverage is. If you are in a location where the medical standards are not adequate, then you really don't want to take your chances and then you also don't want to be penny pinching and saying, well it's going to cost me \$50,000 to get a [medevac](#)²⁹ out of the country and I can't afford that.

Emily Kumler: And so then more specifically focusing in on women, I think we have a statistic that it's like [23% of most sort of like travel risk security programs are actually specifically taking into account the different security risks that females face versus males](#)³⁰. And given that more women are traveling by themselves, I feel like that's pretty interesting. I mean, I was just saying to Jill before we called you up, that like when I travel I have a lot of different things that I'm thinking about than my husband or any of the guys that I'm friends with. And even on this trip to Peru, there was a guy who I became friendly with and he was talking about how the city was like really beautiful to walk around at night and how he had, you know, sort of just explored in the way the streets are lit and the way that, you know, it's built on a hill and all this stuff. And I was like, wow, that sounds amazing. I would never do that. Like I would never get that travel experience because I'd be way too nervous walking around by myself as a woman in a foreign city, especially one where we were. And so I just think like the whole experience of travel, we share many things with our male counterparts, but as far as security goes, I think we're worried about different stuff. I mean, I'd be mad if somebody stole my computer, but that's definitely not the thing that I'm the most worried about. Right? I'm thinking about like rape, kidnap, murder, like serious stuff. And so I sort of wonder like from your perspective, both as you know, again like a sort of a security expert as well as an expert traveler. How do you think women should evaluate the space that they're going in knowing that a lot the information is put out there, like the

²⁹ <https://airmed.com/Services/Aeromedical-Transport-and-Evacuation-Services/Medevac>

³⁰According to this article, the number is 27%

<https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/89975-tips-for-protecting-our-female-business-travelers>

state department didn't seem to specify between are you a woman or a man traveler?

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah. While there are a lot of risks that are present to both men and women, travel profiles are really important. And that's going to vary. Not just based on male or female, it's going to vary based on your age. It's going to be based your nationality or ethnicity, your religion, sexual orientation, you know if you're a gay or lesbian traveler, all of those risk profiles, and especially if they're overlapping risk profiles, are going to determine kind of your exposure to certain risks in the location. So it really does vary. And unfortunately, there are some additional considerations that women need to take when they are planning their trip and then when they are in their environment, and kind of the example you gave, you know, you're never going to get that experience. And that's really, you know, it's unfortunate. You could try to go for that experience, but you're exposing yourself to additional risks. So factoring in, are there certain things that, you know, you really need to kind of prevent against? I'm normally an adventurous traveler. I remember when I traveled to India and I was on my own and the advice that I was given, you know, don't go out in the evenings on your own, come back to your hotel, you know, after dark. And I was really frustrated because I was seeing this kind of vibrant life outside and in the markets, and there's just this energy that I wanted to take in and experience and I had to kind of put myself on my curfew and say, now, in your best interest, this is when you should go back to your hotel. Factoring in those unique risks that are presented to women, you know, it's going to be increased risk as you mentioned, of sexual harassment, of sexual assault, a greater target of petty or opportunistic crime or scams. And a lot of that is based on the perception that women are weak or women are vulnerable. Sometimes women are more approachable, especially if it's related to some sort of scam or engaging them in conversation, to get engaged with someone and get them distracted, which is when they might, you know, you might be pickpocketed based on being distracted. So I think there is a targeting of females based on perceived vulnerability in a lot of destinations around the world and that is what female travelers need to take into account when they think about, you know, their accommodation selection, their transportation selection, their activities, socializing, you know, is it safe to go out on your own in the evenings?

Emily Kumler: Or have a drink at the bar?

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah, or have a drink at the bar. And factoring in alcohol consumption for two reasons. One, because as soon as you do start consuming alcohol, the sharpness of your awareness starts to decrease. There's also a risk

of, you know, [drink spiking](#)³¹. And that's true in a lot of countries. So being very aware of, you know, keeping an eye on your food, on your drink, sometimes it can be quite exhausting because your guard is up a lot, right, in certain locations and you have to decide, you know, am I ready for that? Am I ready to be kind of overly vigilant, aware of my surroundings? And as need be, you know, take certain steps to say, okay, this is when I need to go back to my hotel or I don't feel comfortable and I'm going to do something about that.

Emily Kumler: I'll never forget the first time that I went over to the Middle East by myself. And my dad drove me to the airport. I had short notice. So it wasn't like there was a lot of time to like mentally prepare for what I was going to get myself into. And I had no idea really what I was getting myself into. But I can remember my dad dropped me off at Logan, the airport in Boston. My parents lived in Iran and Afghanistan for a while, so my dad has experience over there, although albeit a long time ago. And he was like, the minute that you feel comfortable, honey, is the minute that you're not safe. And I was like, what the fuck kind of advice is that? Like I'm already nervous. And he's basically like, don't ever let your guard down.

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah. So awareness is the biggest thing. It is very easy in this day and age to find distractions. It's usually in the form of, you know, your smart phone, you know, in the palm of your hand, you suddenly get sucked into something, whether it's communicating with someone back at home or you're on Google Maps trying to find your way, or you're looking up some great Yelp review to figure out where to go for dinner. It's really easy to get sucked into the world on your phone and lose awareness of the world around you. And that is when, you know, you're going to miss something. You're going miss someone who is looking at you as a potential target for, usually it's opportunistic crime, but it could be that they see you're distracted and they have, they have bad motives. I will say, there's some positives of being a female traveler. On the flip side of the kind of perception of vulnerability and weakness, women also tend to be perceived as friendly, approachable, and kind. And so in instances where you do need help, or you do need information, or you do need support, there is a greater likelihood that individuals around you will help you. Back to my trip to India, and I was traveling alone and I had my suitcase, I was going to take a train from [Agra](#)³² to [Jaipur](#)³³. And the train was really early in the morning and there was a dense, dense cover fog. So much so that the trains were all delayed. So I was standing on the platform and I was attracting a lot of attention, by doing

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/drink-spike-how-to-stop-protect-clubbing-bars-drinkaware-spiking-a8546726.html>

32 <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/uttar-pradesh/agra>

33 <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/rajasthan/jaipur>

nothing, just being a solo Caucasian woman standing on the platform alone. And I was just feeling really uncomfortable with the stares that I was getting. And there was this lovely family, a couple with two kids, that were sitting on a bench waiting. They could tell that I was getting unwanted attention and they invited me to come and sit with them. They were warm and friendly and they wanted to help me. I didn't overtly ask for help, but they wanted to make that situation more comfortable for me. And so that sort of help or kind of gestures I think you see that, if you do go to restaurants on your own or, you know, if you're at a hotel, a lot of times the employees at the restaurant or the hotel, they'll go and make a little more effort to, you know, seat you at a table that's in a good location in the restaurant where you'll feel comfortable or not self-conscious. And then the only thing when you get to that point, which you mentioned, you know, being cautious of people who are overly friendly and still keeping your guard up to make sure that they're not also going to try to scam you through friendliness.

Emily Kumler: I think you and I have talked about this before, too, but there's also something about smiling. Like I tend to smile at people, especially kids, when I see them. In some foreign places, that does bring about some like unwanted attention. And I don't know how you assess that before you get into a situation where you're like, oh no, I shouldn't be smiling back at men. I should be like avoiding their eye contact because it's signifying something different here than what I intend it to sort of mean. But I think that's an interesting one, too. Right? Like in some places you go and people are friendly and they'll say like, oh hi, what's your name? And you're like, oh, I'm Emily, I'm from Boston. And they'll tell you all their, you know, where they're from and all the times that they've ever visited the United States. And it's lovely. And other times it takes a dark turn and you're like, oh crap, get me out of here, or this isn't what I wanted at all.

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah, absolutely. I think in general, Americans, we smile a lot. And it's a good thing, but when you do travel, you have to kind of put that in check a bit and make sure that you're not giving some sort of facial gesture that can be misconstrued by a culture that isn't as used to being around smiling people. That smile could be misinterpreted. I think sometimes if you're in a place where it's appropriate, you know, wearing sunglasses can help with some of the eye contact. A lot of times you just have to be aware of your body gestures or facial gestures, making sure that you're not giving off the wrong impression, especially around men. It could be your waiter, they think you're flirting with them. You're not, you're just used to being friendly. So it's a little bit of an adjustment if that's your normal style. But I'd say there are a lot of times you travel where you have to make those accommodations. And sometimes it is with the clothes that you wear. And we're talking about kind of preparing and

being comfortable for a destination. You know, maybe you're not going to wear the clothing that you wear on a regular basis. You're going to pack clothing that, you know, even if it's hot, you're still going to have your shoulders covered, you're still going to have your legs covered. Maybe you like wearing shorts or skirts that are above the knee, you know, going out and getting some longer, you know, clothes that cover your full legs. They may not be your kind of true fashion, your true style, but it is reflective of the environment that you're operating in.

Emily Kumler: Well, and I think it's like what you were saying before too, it's like a risk reward, right? So like, while, you know, the feminist in me is like, you shouldn't compromise who you are in this situation. It's like, yes, you should because otherwise you're going to have a terrible time. So like if you're deciding to go enter another environment, then you have to be aware of what those environmental sort of standards are for women, like it or not. And if you don't, if you're like really opposed to that, then go somewhere else, I think.

Erika Weisbrod: Yeah. Or accept the risk. Right? And then accept the consequences of that. I've had conversations about that when it comes to the LGBTQ community and kind of giving advice of saying kind of maintain a low profile when traveling. I've had individuals say, you know, I just came out and I'm really proud about it and I want to, you know, are you trying to put me back in the closet by telling me to keep a low profile when I traveled to a country where the tolerance for homosexuality is very low? Like, it's actually [against the law](#)³⁴. And so I would never tell someone, you know, go back into the closet. Absolutely not. That's not where that advice is coming from. It is, this is the risk that your profile may have in this country. You know, this is a recommendation on how not to attract attention related to that. So it is that kind of risk versus reward of, you know, how do you accommodate in going to a country and going outside of your normal environment.

Emily Kumler: You know, I mean I feel like the other part of this that's interesting to me is like just your own personal experience. And so like I have this sort of fantasy that like, you know, you get a client who calls up and says like, I'm going to, you know, whatever, South Africa. And you're like, okay, I'm going to go check it out for you. And you like go put yourself in all these dangerous situations and then you come back and you're like, don't go here. Go here. This is better. Like, can you talk a little bit about your own experience with travel?

Erika Weisbrod: I mean, I work as part of a very large company. We have about 12,000 employees that are in around 90 countries. So I'm certainly not

³⁴ <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/>

singlehandedly going around and vetting and checking on every single one of these locations. We have a pretty robust team that does our country visits. We're looking at, you know, secure hotels. We're looking at infrastructure. We have medical professionals that are visiting clinics, hospitals. We're vetting providers on the ground that can support whether it's for secure transport, it could be for executive protection. It could be for meet and greet arrangements. So we're going through and we're looking at all of these facets of what does each country have as far as their own resources? And then what's also likely to trigger kind of a deterioration in that security environment, which may require us leveraging those providers. Right now we see kind of [protests in Hong Kong](#)³⁵. Hong Kong's not a high risk environment, but you know, what do people need to know about whether they're traveling there for personal reasons or for business. What do they need to know about the disruption surrounding the ongoing protests in Hong Kong? So making sure that they're informed. And in that case, you know, we have someone on the ground in Hong Kong who's providing us with a lot of information, so that we can give advice that is kind of up to date and relevant for anyone who's going there.

Emily Kumler: And then I think the last question I had for you, which is really more curiosity than anything, a lot of times we are on the podcast interviewing doctors and researchers. And I had this sort of idea at the beginning of the project that we were going to try and get as many female sources as we could. Just because I felt like as a tech reporter, I was constantly asking women for interviews and they would often defer me to men. And I thought that was so interesting that like, you know, it was harder to get women to do the interview. And so with this project I really wanted it to be women's health, but also like let's talk to more women who are doing this kind of research. And it has been so easy because it turns out that women are really interested in female, like sort of experiences. And, you know, when it comes to medical stuff, obviously the women are interested in the female body in a different kind of way. Right? And I think in med school when they realize there aren't a lot of sex differences, that's sort of confirmed for them that they have to go into that. But from your perspective, I feel like, you know, now you're really the security expert when it comes to travel. Is there any part of your job that involves being a woman in a senior position having to do with security where you have to explain to people that women's experiences are different?

Erika Weisbrod: We have to identify that there are unique female travel security risks that need to be addressed. In the same way we look at it from a broader kind of diversity and inclusion standpoint. And how can we support that

and how can organizations address and support that? I think organizations and my colleagues in the industry have actually been very receptive to understanding and addressing female travel risk. You know, how quickly that gets incorporated or what the steps are that are actually taken to actualize that, you know, it really varies from organization to organization, but I think looking at kind of broader travel risk, it's more about making sure that all employees are supported. All travelers, if they're traveling kind of on their own, have the information to be able to be smart and confident travelers in wherever they're going. There are, you know, certain destinations or certain profile trips that would have increased risk for a female traveler, whether it's personal travel or business travel. So a lot of women, when they're looking at their work trips, you know, they actually put their hands up, they want to go to a lot of destinations because it will further advance their career to be able to operate in higher risk environments. They'll get experience on the ground, whether it's kind of field experience or getting the research that they need conducted or working on a high profile project. They don't want to feel like their professional ambitions are being deterred because it's not safe for a woman to travel to that country. So a lot of the emphasis has been on enabling the travel and making sure that as we see an increasing number of women conduct international travel and especially travel related to their jobs, how can we support them? How can organizations, you know, if they are going to send them, what measures need to be taken when they look at accommodation, when they look at transportation, to enable their professional success? And not say that they have to be held back or that they can't put, you know, their application in for an expatriate assignment.

Emily Kumler: I mean basically that would be discrimination on the grounds of it's not safe. Right?

Erika Weisbrod: Exactly. So ultimately, it's up to the traveler or the employee to say, you know, okay, I'm not comfortable traveling to that destination. I don't want to assume that risk. But, you know, the goal is to include every female employee. When we look at it, when we talk about LGBTQ travel risk, how can you enable that person to succeed in that assignment? Whether it's a short-term business trip or it's a long-term assignment. It is about advancing women in their respective professional fields because each organization we see as having some sort of global touch. You know, there are very few organizations that are only domestic focused, whether it's that they have some sort of import business or they have business development managers or they attend conferences. Most of the work that we do now has some international touch. So enabling women to be able to be part of that is part of what we do and part of what I think is very important. If you look at the security industry, it still is predominantly male. I think that we're seeing a change in terms of the number of women that are entering the security field. I

think it's especially important because the advice that we're giving is to support, you know, 50% of the population, which is female travelers. So we need to look at it from a female perspective as well.

Emily Kumler: Regular listeners will notice that I've been talking a lot about my trip to Peru. Here and there, it sort of seems to come up, whether I'm talking about motherhood or travel or whatnot. But yeah, it was a really transformative trip for me. One of the things that happened was along the way, I took a bus and I sat next to this woman who was from Germany. She was going around Peru for a couple of days, and then she was going to head to Brazil for a couple of days, and she was going to end up going to about 12 countries on the month that she had off. I was really struck by the fact that she was on a group of people from all over the world and that they were all spending about a month traveling together, and I think there's something really interesting about the idea that when people have discretionary income in other parts of the world, they use it primarily to see the world. Whereas in America, we seem to be just buying loads of crap. This is something that you're not going to up and change your lifestyle completely overnight. But for me it was really interesting. I mean, first of all, the fact that you get a month's vacation and you can go travel the world would be great. Most of us aren't afforded that time off. But I also think the way Americans approach vacation is quite different. And there's all kinds of [interesting figures](#)³⁶ coming out now about how China was one of the main sort of sources of tourism in the United States. And now the Chinese are deciding to go other places. And part of that is because of the, you know, sort of new trade war in different political elements that are happening here. But I also think what's interesting is that there are so many parts of the world that we could all be exploring. And the idea that people aren't coming to the United States at the same rates and [Americans are not going abroad at the same rates that they used to even 20 years ago](#).³⁷ And I think somebody like Diana, who we opened the episode with, is more and more an outlier, right? It used to be after you graduated from college, maybe you'd go spend a year, you know, backpacking around Europe or you know, you'd spend your junior year abroad, most of which, you know, was done in Europe. And now I think the world has become so much more open. I mean, even spending time in South America was so fun and fantastic. And I had all these revelations about how I was an ancient history major. And basically the Incas conquered the same territory as the Romans, only it took the Romans 300 years. It took the [Incas](#)³⁸ three, three, years. And I hadn't

³⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/business/trade-war-us-china-tourism.html>

³⁷

https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/media_root/document/Paid%20Time%20Off%20Trends%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf Correction: Emily meant to highlight the decline in Americans using their vacation time here, but international travel by Americans is up overall [according to recent research](#)

³⁸ <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/inca-empire/>

learned anything about that when I was younger. And so we're going to go back to Diana, just briefly, before we end the episode. But I hope that this has inspired everybody these two weeks to take some vacation, take some time off and go and just let your mind be alive by differences and excitement and the thrill of not really knowing what the day will bring, which I think is sort of the best part of traveling is that you are on an adventure. And sure, you could do that at home, you can do that by traveling the United States. We're lucky we live in a wonderful country that's massive, with lots of diversity. But there is something quite different about being in a place where you don't speak the language or the costumes are very different. So, we're going to go back to Diana and hear how seeing the world changes perspective. And so now when you go on trips, do you think about them any differently? Like has your perspective changed having sort of been a citizen of the world for as long as you were?

Diana Edelman: You know, I find such joy in being out. Like there's this feeling you get, like when you land and you walk off the plane and you're going through customs and you walk out into like whatever city you're in. And it's just pure, unfiltered joy and excitement to be somewhere. And I cherish that and I keep that when I'm traveling now. I also know my limits. Three weeks is my limit. Like after three weeks or just about right before three weeks I'm done, I want to go home. But I really try to kind of always be open and just really see everything. Like I'm not the type of person that just goes to museums. I like to kind of dig in and see what the culture's like and experience what locals experience more so than like, oh, I've got a church to go see and then I've got this art museum. I like to get out there and just kind of like, you know, see what people who live there see and have that kind of experience.

Emily Kumler: And then like, what about like scammers or like, are there any things that you feel like you fell into as like, whether it was like getting ripped off financially or trying to link up with people that didn't work out the way you wanted it to, that you feel like you learned from and like didn't repeat those mistakes?

Diana Edelman: I mean, if you're traveling and you don't get scammed or ripped off, you are so lucky. I mean, I knew a lot of the scams going in, so I was very aware of them. But I'm pretty sure I got ripped off when I was in Morocco. I was walking through [Fez](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/morocco/the-mediterranean-coast-and-the-rif/fes)³⁹ and this guy kept coming up to me, he's like, let me be your tour guide. I'm like, no, I just wanted to be left alone. No. And he was aggressive and finally I'm like, fine, okay, I will go with you and you can show me around your city. And so he literally took me to like shop to shop to shop and a couple of like really cool things along the way. But like it was

³⁹ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/morocco/the-mediterranean-coast-and-the-rif/fes>

literally he just wanted me to go and buy things because he would get a kick back from the store. I mean, and that's not just Morocco. That's a lot of places.

Emily Kumler: Yeah. I actually had that experience in [St. Petersburg](#)⁴⁰ in Russia where I like had found these old military surplus stores, so they had like old military, like Soviet, like medals or cool, like what I thought would be really awesome souvenirs, to bring home. And I had like a driver and a translator because it was very hard to just like have access to walk around the city on my own. And I literally was like, here, this is the address of this military store that I want to go to. And they were like talking to each other in Russian and then the translator was like, oh sorry, that's not open anymore. And I was like, what? And she's like, how about looking at fur coats? And I was like, what is happening? And I was like, no, I want to go to the military store. And then I was like, I had like five on my list and she was like, the driver wants to know why you want to bring home our history. And I was like, oh well I'm really interested in history. And like I think your history is very interesting. Like I tried to say it in a way that was like really complimentary. And she was like, oh, he says he knows a perfect place for you then. And we ended up at a fur coat store. It's like, what the hell? And they were like, oh yeah, and we can get you 20% off. And I was like, I want military, like medals and weird old weapons. What are we doing here?

Diana Edelman: And that's everywhere. Like there's a scam where like you go up to museum but you're at the wrong entrance and someone's like, oh, this museum is closed today. I'll take you to another one. And then you're out, you're done. You know? Or there's the cab one. Oh, so always ask for a meter in a cab and if they don't give you the meter, get out. I met people when I was traveling in Romania and they didn't have the meter and it was literally maybe like a 20 minute ride from the airport to the city and they got charged 600 euros.

Emily Kumler: Wow. And then you have to pay it. I mean like what happens if you don't?

Diana Edelman: For sure, yeah. And you know, it's just like, what do you do? Okay. Like chalk it up to a lesson. A very expensive lesson, but you know, I think you kind of learn along the way, to trust your gut as well. You know, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Emily Kumler: Are there any other like, tips or tricks that you think are helpful for people to know or things that you learned that you wished you had known earlier?

⁴⁰ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/russia/st-petersburg>

Diana Edelman: Trust your gut. Like, if something doesn't feel right then don't do it. I've traveled so often now and there have been times where I've been like, oh, this probably isn't the best idea for me, but I'm like, oh, but it does X, Y, and Z. So, okay. And then like, it just doesn't end well. So, you know, if you get a bad feeling or if you know, there's just something telling you like, don't, don't do this or do this instead, like listen to it because there's a reason, you know, and just be mindful. I think that's the most important thing. People ask all the time, aren't you scared? And I've never been scared traveling solo. It's never crossed my mind to travel solo because like it wasn't an option to not travel solo. You know? I mean there are times where like I'm a little freaked out, like walking back by myself at night or something. So I just don't do it.

Emily Kumler: But that's such a good lesson too, right? Like, know what your own comfort zone is and don't push it in any environment. You wouldn't want to do that in Vegas or like in Boston or New York or whatever. Like, so why would you do it somewhere else?

Diana Edelman: Yeah. And I think also, be respectful and polite. You know, I think a lot of times, a lot of countries have this horrible idea about Americans. And it's really important to not be that stereotype when you travel. You know? Be nice, be courteous, take a couple minutes to learn hello, goodbye, please, thank you in the language of the country you're going because it really, it goes a long way.

Emily Kumler: Yeah. And we expect the same thing when people come here. Right? So it shouldn't be any different. I think that's good advice.

Diana Edelman: Thank you. You know, I want to say this, a lot of people tell me I'm brave for traveling and and like I always say, I don't look at it as brave. I look at it as it's what I want to do. So I'm going to do it. So if you don't think you're brave enough, brave shouldn't be a vocabulary word that crosses your mind when it comes to traveling. You know, if you want to do it, try, you could always come home.

Emily Kumler: I'm Emily Kumler and that was Empowered Health. Thanks for joining us. Don't forget to check out our website at empoweredhealthshow.com for all the show notes, links to everything that was mentioned in the episode, as well as a chance to sign up for our newsletter and get some extra fun tidbits. See you next week.