

Episode 46: Morocco ... the 1st time

Summary

Nick and Wendy have travelled a lot, but the first time they went to Morocco in 2001 they were inexperienced and unprepared. In this conversation they talk about the culture shock they experienced in Morocco.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about visiting Morocco, and it's a country that we've both been to twice, and we had very different experiences both times. So we're going to do a two-part episode talking about our first experience and then our second experience because they were quite different, right?

Wendy: They were, yes. And the first experience was actually not with the two of us together. We didn't even know each other at that time. But, oddly enough¹, I think we both kind of had a similar experience when ... in our first time going to Morocco, even though they were two separate trips and they were individual trips.

Nick: Yeah, so I think we were both at a similar stage in our travelling lives, which is that we'd been to Western Europe, umm, and then you'd obviously come from the U.S., I'd come from Australia, so we'd only been to first world countries, and Morocco was completely different. This was many, many years ago, so it was 16 years ago, and, yeah, as you said, we actually went within about six months of each other, uhh, even though we didn't know each other. And so do you remember why you wanted to go in the first place?

Wendy: Umm, I think I was a little bit lost at that point. I had been working in France for a while and had quit there because I didn't like it, but ... I didn't like the job, but I loved being in Europe and I didn't want to go back to the States. But I didn't really know what I wanted to do or what I could do in Europe and how I could stay there, how I could live there and work there legally. So I was just kind of travelling around aimlessly, just searching for my new direction in life. And I think someone had suggested it to me when I was staying in Paris, inside a bookstore, which maybe that is a whole nother² episode that we can do sometime. But I was living briefly in a bookstore in Paris, and there were lots of people coming through who would stay there for a little while and I met a woman who said she was going

¹ oddly enough: in a strange occurrence or coincidence

² a whole nother: another entire (episode). It separates the word *another* and puts *whole* in between the two parts. See also: Episode 27: Half and Half.

to Morocco and I think that that was the first time that I'd ever even considered Morocco. Umm, because at that point my idea of travel was really just Western Europe and I hadn't really looked beyond those borders yet.

Nick: Yeah, I mean my story, in a way is similar, in a way it's different. I'd just started travelling in Europe and I was only 21 at the time and I arrived in London, I saw my brother Mark in London, then I went to France, spent a little bit of time in France, a little bit of time in Spain and then I was in the south of Spain and Morocco was right there. Umm, and so I thought, 'OK, why not?' Umm, but I'd only been travelling a few weeks, you know, in very easy countries for travel. Uhh, I didn't know anything about Morocco at all. Umm, I was completely unprepared, I was really a bad traveller at that time. I think I only really learned how to be a traveller once I met you and we started going to more different places. Umm, but basically you can take a boat across the Straits of Gibraltar from the south of Spain to Morocco and so it seemed pretty easy, the boat's quite a short trip, and so I said, 'OK, why not? Let's go, uhh, and see what it's like on the other side,' But I had no idea what I was getting into with Morocco.

Wendy: Yeah, me either. I was also pretty unprepared. I remember I had a guidebook to Spain and Portugal, and it included a tiny little section in the back of the guidebook on Morocco, because, like you said, it is so accessible from the south of Spain. You can just take this quick boat trip and a lot of people do that, uhh, even if it's just for a few days, they tack on³ a few days onto their trip in Spain. So this guidebook had decided to put in a short section on Morocco and I thought that was enough, umm, but it wasn't. But more than just the logistic information that I was lacking, I was also completely unprepared for the experience of travelling in a developing country.

Nick: Yeah, me too, completely. And I didn't even have any kind of guidebook that included Morocco. I had a Western Europe book and that was it. So I really had no idea what it was going to be like. And I remember just ... basically, when I was on the boat, I made friends with an English guy Sam, who I'm still in touch with⁴, umm, because we had this amazing shared experience together in Morocco. Umm, and so we arrived Tangier, which is the port of Morocco. And Tangier is awful, and I just hated it. Umm, and I've never been back to it even though we've been back to Morocco but it's always the example of a town that I give that I just hated. Umm, you just get off the boat and you're just swamped⁵ by all these people coming, taxi drivers, other people trying to take you places and I'd never experienced that before. I'd never seen touts⁶ or people really trying to attach themselves to you, you know, trying to get something out of you. Umm, and I just

³ tack on (phrasal verb): to add on at the end

⁴ in touch with: in regular contact with

⁵ swamped: overwhelmed

⁶ touts: people who come up to you on the street trying to sell their services (hotels, restaurants, tour companies etc)

didn't know how to deal with it, because I also didn't know what I was doing and where I was going. And later we've learned to be confident and to, you know, have an idea of where you're going so that you, you know, you don't look lost or attract these types of people, but at that time that wasn't the case, and so I was just completely ripe⁷, I guess, for these people to just come and attach them(selves) to me, and my friend Sam was also in a similar situation. And so we had just fight off all of these people but it was hard to know who to trust or who to believe or what was true and what wasn't true and I really didn't like it.

Wendy: Yeah, I definitely remember arriving in the port in Tangier and also being completely overwhelmed and, yeah, surrounded by people who were trying to get my money in some way or, umm ... also I had the added situation of being a 20-something-year-old girl travelling on her own and getting a lot of unwanted attention from men in a way that I had not experienced before. And that was completely overwhelming to me and I realised straight away that I didn't want to be in this country on my own, I didn't want to travel on my own. So luckily I met some other people in the hostels that I stayed in and ended up travelling with them for a while. So I travelled with a group of Australian girls, well, young women my age, umm, for a few days and then later I travelled with another group of people, some Canadians and an Australian, kind of a mixed group, and I think some American ... two American guys as well. And eventually I ended up coming back to Portugal with some of them. They had been working in a bar in Lagos, Portugal, and so I went back to Portugal with them and got a job in the same bar, and I'm still in touch with them, with a couple of those people as well. So it all worked out well in the end, but, yeah, that first day in Tangier, was pretty hairy⁸.

Nick: Yeah it definitely got better for me as well. Umm, we went down to Fez straight away and then we met some other people on the train, some other travellers who had, at least, a guidebook and at least knew a little bit more than we did and they knew where they were staying in Fez and things like that. And then that next day, that second day in Fez, was just amazing, 'cause I'd never seen a city like that. Umm, just this old city, very narrow streets, very basic standards of living, uhh, Fez is described as a living medieval city, umm, just the markets and just everything, the noises and the colours and the scents of the flavours of spices and all this kind of stuff and, gosh⁹, I just loved that. But we went, a group of us, uhh, we got a guide who took us around Fez and I just remember thinking, 'If we didn't have him, we wouldn't have known where to go or what to do or we wouldn't have had any idea at all.' So it's funny looking back now, thinking of the kind of, umm, raw traveller that I was at the time. I didn't know anything, I didn't know how to do anything, but, umm, that's what it was, so it was a big, kind of,

⁷ ripe: fruit that is ready to eat. In this case Nick means that he was just the type of person the touts and hustlers were looking for because of his inexperience. In this sense, it's often extended to *ripe for the picking*.

⁸ hairy: scary, risky, difficult

⁹ gosh (interjection): Used as an exclamation, like *my god* or *goodness* or *dear me*, etc.

wake-up call¹⁰ to go to Morocco and understand what it was like to travel in a place like that.

Wendy: Yeah, and so did that leave you wanting more of that kind of travel or were you ... was it too much at the time?

Nick: No, initially it was too much. We were there for eight days, umm, and some parts we really enjoyed but both Sam and I got really sick as well. Umm, so once we got back to Spain we were really happy to be back in Spain but it was an eye-opening experience. So, umm, I think at that time I wasn't really that keen to go back, but then, you know, later on I met you and we started doing seriously a lot of travel in the third world, or in the developing countries, and then I got really a taste for it again and really loved it after that but that first time, it was just too much for me at that time. I just wasn't ready for it.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, I wasn't ready for it either. But I was very lucky to find people who I was comfortable with and, you know, who ... I could enjoy it with them. I felt much safer travelling in a group. But, yeah, it was pretty overwhelming for me too.

Nick: And then, of course, the next year, or in fact later that year we met, and then we became a couple the year after that and then ... so we went back to Morocco six years after our first trip, and thankfully we were much more experienced and knew what to expect and I think we had a much better experience because of that.

Wendy: Yeah, and we can talk about that in another episode.

¹⁰ wake-up call: an alert, in this case that Nick needed to be more prepared when visiting a place like Morocco

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nick and Wendy decide to go to Morocco in the first place?
2. How did Wendy deal with travelling on her own in Morocco?
3. Why didn't Nick like Tangier?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. I can't go out tonight after all because I need to stay late at the office. I'm _____ with work at the moment.
2. He wasn't putting in enough effort at work and he almost got fired. It was a real _____ for him and now he's working much harder.
3. She's still _____ many of her friends from high school. They regularly go out to lunch together.
4. We were originally going to take a two-week holiday but in the end we decided to _____ another week so we could really make the most of it.
5. The day that we first met was also the day that I lost my phone, but that's _____ story.
6. _____, Nick and his brother Mark both married American women and both met them in Italy in the same year.
7. Being in a taxi in a city like Cairo can often be a _____ experience. You feel like your life is in danger!
8. "Did you hear that Ian lost his job?"
"_____, I didn't know that. That's terrible news!"
9. If you go to Morocco you can expect to be swamped by _____ in the major cities, especially around the bus or train stations, where they'll try to take you to their hotel.
10. Pickpockets in major tourist areas like to target unsuspecting tourists who might be carrying a lot of money and who are often _____ for the picking.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you ever been to Morocco? If so, what did you think of it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Nick and Wendy's first experience in Morocco could be described as 'culture shock'. Have you ever experienced culture shock? When and where?
3. Do you like holidays like this one where you discover a new place and have what Nick described as an eye-opening experience, or do you prefer relaxing holidays in more familiar countries?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Nick went because he was nearby in southern Spain, and Wendy went because she had met a woman who was going there and she was 'travelling aimlessly'.
2. She met other travellers and travelled with them, which made her feel safer and more at ease.
3. He didn't like Tangier because he was overwhelmed by the touts and other untrustworthy people who approached him.

Exercises

1. swamped
2. wake-up call
3. in touch with
4. tack on
5. a whole nother
6. oddly enough
7. hairy
8. Gosh
9. touts
10. ripe