

## Episode 50: Top 5 Countries

### Summary

To celebrate the fiftieth episode of the podcast, Nick and Wendy each list their five favourite countries in the world. Some of their choices might surprise you!

### Transcript

Nick: Hello and welcome to our fiftieth episode of the *English in 10 Minutes* podcast. I'm here with Wendy and that's an exciting little milestone.

Wendy: It is, and I can't believe that it's been fifty episodes already. When you told me that, I was really shocked. It seems like it's gone by so quickly.

Nick: It has, definitely. And so because it's the fiftieth episode, we thought we would do something a little bit different. And so we've decided that each of us will name our top five countries that we've visited in the world. As you know, uhh, the podcast is about places as well as people and their stories, so we talk a lot about travel, and so we thought it would be fun to have this list and to compare our lists. Now, we haven't done this exercise for a while. Years and years ago we used to make lists like this because it was fun to do. Umm, so we haven't seen each other's list. But I'd say there's probably going to be quite a bit of crossover between the two. We tend to like the same places.

Wendy: Yeah, but I don't know, we'll see. I have a couple that I don't know if I've mentioned before, so we'll see.

Nick: OK, so ladies first. What's your number five?

Wendy: Alright. My number five is Madagascar.

Nick: Wow!

Wendy: Uhh, so yeah, that was kind of a last-minute addition, but it is, uhh, well if you don't know, it's an island kind of off the coast of Africa. So it is considered to be part of Africa, but it's unique in that<sup>1</sup> the people and the animals, uhh, who live there, don't look like the people and the animals that live on the main continent of Africa. And so you have animals like lemurs, which you find pretty much only in Madagascar and a couple of other nearby islands. And I love lemurs! They're like

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<sup>1</sup> in that: because

monkeys, they're related to monkeys but, umm, oh, they're just so adorable and there are so many different kinds of them, and, yeah, that was the highlight of Madagascar for me, was the animals, the fauna<sup>2</sup> that lives there.

Nick: OK. Uhh, my number five is India. And basically you can't go to India and then come home and then somebody says, 'How was India?' And you say, 'Oh, it was OK.' That's just not possible. When you go to India, it impacts you to the very core of you, to your very soul. And so it's just humanity at its most extraordinary: umm, the poverty, the noise, the colour, the religion, just the madness of it all, cows on the street, camels on the streets in Rajasthan. There's just no place like India. Love it or hate it, there's no place like India.

Wendy: That is very true.

Nick: So my number five is India.

Wendy: Alright, good choice. OK, my number four is Iceland.

Nick: Wow, another one off the radar<sup>3</sup> a little bit.

Wendy: Yep, those were my two, kind of, surprise entries. Yeah, Iceland is just incredible. It really feels like you're on another planet. And in this case it's more about the landscapes than the animals and, yeah, more so, yeah, not so much about the people, either. We didn't really have lots of close interactions with people, maybe because we were camping because it was so expensive and we couldn't afford the accommodation there. But, yes, that meant that we were really in nature the whole time, and you just see all kinds of things: hot springs and, umm, you know, this gas rising out of the ground and, yeah, some of it really looks like a moonscape. You have these volcanoes and all these kinds of lava flows and just all kinds of landscapes that I don't think you see anywhere else.

Nick: OK, good choice. My number four is a bit of a surprise probably to our listeners, not so much to you, and it's Pakistan.

Wendy: Uhh-huh.

Nick: Uhh, simply because ... a few different reasons. It was such a pleasant surprise, which is not what you would think of. We'd been in India for a long time, we went to Pakistan and we were a bit tired. But suddenly it reinvigorated<sup>4</sup> us. It was so much cleaner and neater and more orderly than we had thought and than India. Umm, and we loved the cities in the lowlands and the people were incredibly friendly, and then later we went to the mountains and that was just absolutely mind-blowing. And I think people aren't even really aware, necessarily, that

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<sup>2</sup> fauna: animal life (from Latin). The equivalent word for plant life is *flora*.

<sup>3</sup> off the radar: unexpected, out of left field

<sup>4</sup> reinvigorated: re-energised, rejuvenated

Pakistan has these incredible mountains. But for example, the second-highest mountain in the world, K2, is in Pakistan. And so the whole thing was one huge surprise and it was just a really incredible destination. So that's my number four.

Wendy: Yep, I will agree with that. Pakistan was incredible. And I think it's interesting that you loved Pakistan so much because it wasn't India, and yet India is also in your top five, so that speaks pretty highly for<sup>5</sup> the Indian subcontinent as a whole.

Nick: Definitely.

Wendy: Alright, my number three is China, which, uhh, you may know if you've listened to the podcast for a while, we've talked about China before. I studied Chinese for several years, and so I've been to China several times, sometimes just for study, sometimes for work with Nick, and then sometimes for travel. And I have kind of a love-hate relationship with China. Uhh, I get frustrated with China in many ways, uhh, but the more I studied the language, the more I understood what was going on around me and understood the culture better and was able to interact with the people more, then I really started to appreciate it. And there are things about China that I still find infuriating<sup>6</sup>, but I think overall I'm so grateful for the opportunity to just see the world through different eyes and to understand that there are people who see the world in a completely different way from how I do, and no place has given me that sense like China has.

Nick: OK, I can't believe we don't have any crossover yet. Uhh, my number three is Spain.

Wendy: Ahh!

Nick: Spain is so vibrant, it's so lively<sup>7</sup>, and that's the first thing that hits you when you go to Spain, especially if you go to one of the great cities of Spain: Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, et cetera. And, you know, there's some countries where people will say, umm, 'To really understand the culture, you know, you need to be invited to somebody's house, to experience that family life in someone's house,' but with Spain I feel as though the culture is so accessible, it's on the streets. Spaniards are out all the time and so you can just become part of it so quickly and so easily. And so I remember going from Geneva which is quite a quiet kind of place and flying to Madrid and then just feeling in a different world as soon as you arrive, as soon as you get out onto the streets you just want to be part of it. And especially this year, we did the Camino de Santiago, which we're going to talk about in a lot of future episodes, and so we understood Spain from a different perspective as well. And so I would say in the last five or six years or so, being based in Europe, there's two

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<sup>5</sup> speaks pretty highly for (or about): says a lot about, praises, recommends

<sup>6</sup> infuriating: extremely frustrating

<sup>7</sup> lively: full of life. (Note the pronunciation, because 'live' has two different meanings and two different pronunciations.)

countries really that we've gone back to again and again, and they're both on my list, and so one of them is Spain.

Wendy: Yeah, OK, that's a good choice. I was trying to spread it out<sup>8</sup> across different continents and different parts of the world, but, yes, Spain is a good choice. Alright, my number two is also a Spanish-speaking country, and that is Peru. So I love South America as a whole, I loved every country that we've visited in South America and it was hard to choose just one of them. But I went with Peru because it does have a little bit of everything. It has incredible mountain scenery, uhh, which you also see in Argentina and Chile. Umm, but in addition to that, it has so much history and culture, umm, you have, you know, the indigenous culture which is still very vibrant there and then you have all of these ancient and, uhh, historical sites and landmarks, umm, old temples and things that are just really impressive in the way that they were put together, uhh, by people who didn't have modern machinery. And there's just so much to see, I feel like we didn't see half of it and it's one place that I would really like to go back to and I don't say that about every place.

Nick: Yeah, it's a good choice, one of the great countries of South America, without a doubt. My number two is Egypt.

Wendy: Uhh-huh.

Nick: Umm, it's certainly not an unknown country, uhh, but it's remarkable. Uhh, firstly, I mean everybody is aware of<sup>9</sup> things like the pyramids and the other great historic sites of Egypt and they are just so incredible. They're so large and so imposing and, you know, we are cultural-historical travellers and so we like to visit these kinds of places, and in other countries you have great ruins and great vestiges of past civilisations. But in Egypt it's pretty much older than everywhere else and bigger and better preserved, and it's just amazing. You can just ... every day you seem to see something incredible in Egypt. And it also goes beyond the monuments as well. We went to a place called the White Desert which was probably the most amazing desert scenery that we've ever seen. Umm, we took a sailboat for a couple of days up the Nile river which was a great experience. On the Sinai peninsula you have, umm, some great snorkelling and things like that that you can do. And so it was one of the first trips that we took together was to go to Egypt and we loved every day of it.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: So my number two is Egypt, uhh, and there is no crossover, still, but I think our number one is the same country.

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<sup>8</sup> to spread it out (phrasal verb with two prepositions): to diffuse, to keep it apart

<sup>9</sup> is aware of: knows about

Wendy: I'm pretty sure it is going to be. And I will say Egypt almost made it onto my list, it was onto (on) my list, and then I made a last-minute switch, but I completely agree with everything you said. Alright, so, number one is Italy.

Nick: Yep.

Wendy: Yep, no surprise there. Umm, so, you might have heard us talk about it before. Italy is actually where Nick and I met back in 2001, and at that time I was working as a tour guide and Nick was a tourist and then he later decided to stay there and become a tour guide himself and so we became colleagues and then we became friends and then we became life partners. Umm, so obviously it has very special sentimental value to us for that reason, but we already loved the country on our own accord as well. Umm, so for me, yeah, it's the language, I really love the sounds of Italian, I love speaking it and listening to it. I love the food, I love the history, umm, the monuments, you know, the layers of history that you have stacked<sup>10</sup> on top of each other in the cities. Umm, and the people are really friendly. I just love everything about Italy.

Nick: Yep, me too. Umm, so, yeah, that's basically what I wanted to say as well. Umm, you know, it's been really great recently, we've gone back, we've gone to areas that we hadn't been to before and you just ... we just keep making these discoveries, or we just keep finding amazing places in Italy everywhere that we go. So a lot of people are very familiar with places like Rome, Florence and Venice, and those are the famous cities of Italy, but there's so much more, so, yeah, every time we go we discover a new area, and, umm, and it's just fabulous every time.

And there you go! So, I hope you enjoyed that. We went a little bit longer than the ten minutes that we usually do, but, umm, we thought we should celebrate in style with our fiftieth episode. So, we hope that you've enjoyed the fifty episodes that we've done so far, we hope there's fifty more and then fifty more after that and, umm, and a lot more to come. Umm, so thank you so much for listening. If you want to help us grow the podcast, please, please, please [leave a rating and a review on iTunes](#). This is the way that the podcast can be discovered by more people and that would be a huge help to us. So thank you very much for listening, and please leave us a review on iTunes so we can do fifty more episodes and beyond.

Wendy: Yep, thank you so much!

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<sup>10</sup> stacked: piled, one on top of the other

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Wendy include Madagascar and Iceland on her list?
2. What does Nick like, in particular, about Spanish culture?
3. What are the personal reasons that helped Nick and Wendy both choose Italy as their favourite country?

## Exercises

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

1. After she changed jobs to a more exciting one, it completely \_\_\_\_\_ her career. Now she loves going to work every day.
2. Piazza Navona in Rome is a very \_\_\_\_\_ place. There are street performers, musicians and artists there, and it's very popular with tourists.
3. I don't think he \_\_\_\_\_ the change in the meeting room. Has anyone told him?
4. There were so many suitcases that they had to be \_\_\_\_\_ on top of the bus, because they didn't fit underneath.
5. We go to the same place for our summer holidays every year. This year, why don't we choose something different that's \_\_\_\_\_?
6. The flora and \_\_\_\_\_ of Australia is unlike anywhere else in the world. There are many unique animal and plant species there.
7. Instead of having our housewarming party the week before Christmas, why don't we postpone it for a month or so to \_\_\_\_\_ a bit more?
8. My friend finds using computers to be \_\_\_\_\_. He didn't grow up using them so he doesn't know how they work and he always makes mistakes.
9. Nepal is a great destination \_\_\_\_\_ it shares a lot of attributes with India, but it's not as intense, so you might be able to enjoy it more.
10. They are very wealthy and could travel to any country in the world, but every year they return to Thailand. That \_\_\_\_\_ how much they love it there.

## Discussion Questions

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

1. What are your top five countries?
2. What image of Pakistan do you have in your mind? Were you surprised to see it on Nick's list?
3. Do you enjoy making lists of favourite places or things? Why or why not?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. She included Madagascar for the lemurs and Iceland for the natural scenery.
2. He likes that Spanish culture is accessible to visitors because it's so visible on the streets and in bars, restaurants etc.
3. They met each other in Italy and, although they didn't mention it in this episode, they also got married in Italy.

### Exercises

1. reinvigorated
2. lively
3. is aware of
4. stacked
5. off the radar
6. fauna
7. to spread it out
8. infuriating
9. in that
10. speaks pretty highly for