

ADVENTURESS











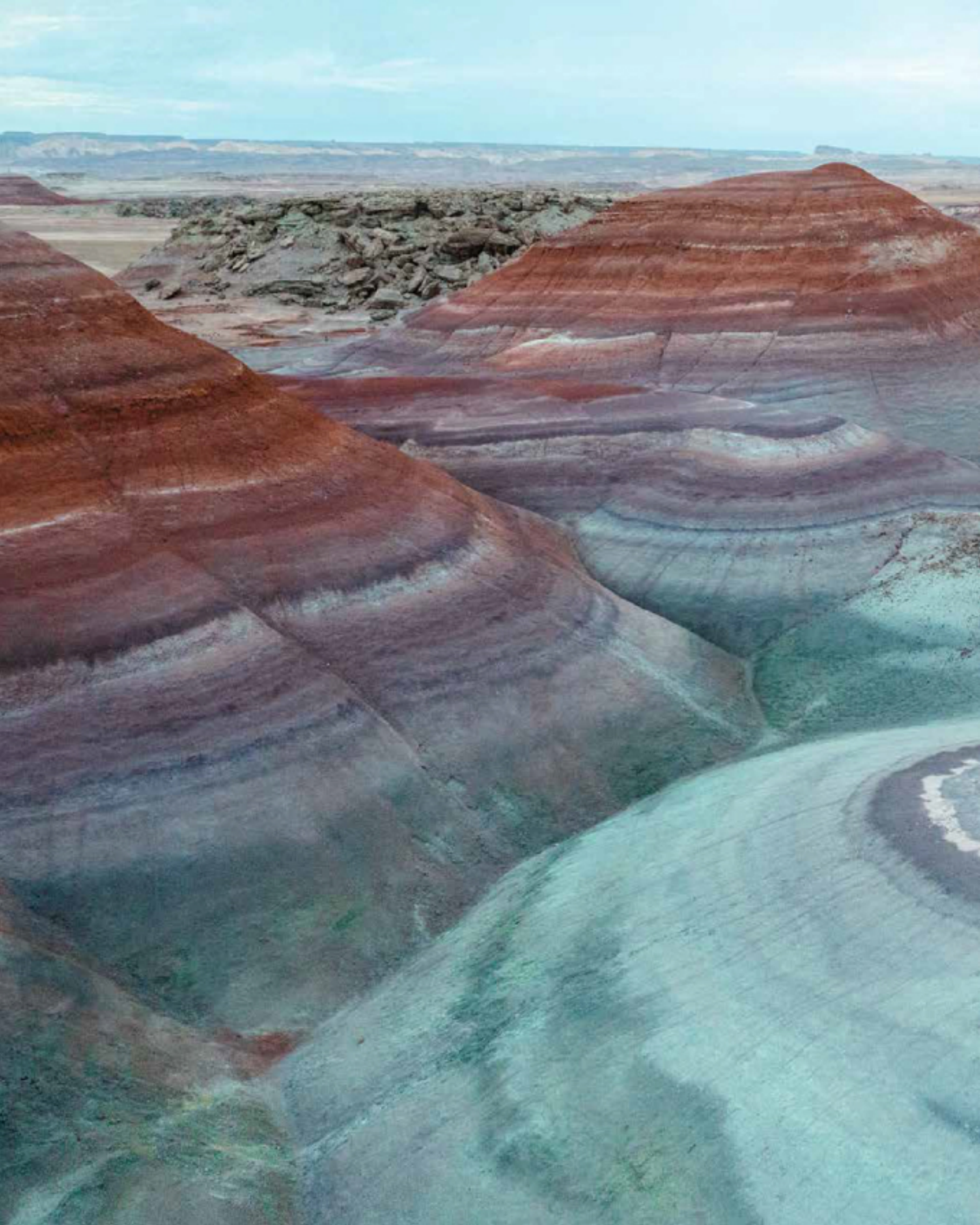
ADVENTURESS

Women Exploring the Wild

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THE SOLO TRAVELER

I've learned more about myself by traveling and adventuring alone than I ever could have any other way.

I never feel more empowered than when I'm out on my own. Whether it's making it to the mountain summit just in time for sunrise after hiking solo in the dark, getting picked up by a friendly driver while hitchhiking abroad, or getting invited to do something unique with locals because there's room for just one more, I've learned more about myself by traveling and adventuring alone than I ever could have any other way.

I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles. I didn't spend a lot of time deep in the mountains, lost in a forest, or staring up at a sky full of stars. I did not start off wanting to do this, or having the confidence to do so many things alone that other people are scared to do. I grew into this person little by little with each passing year of traveling solo around the world.

It started with a career in mergers and acquisitions in my early twenties. I was doing quite well for someone my age, both professionally and financially, but I was miserable. All my life I had done what I thought I was supposed to do. I got good grades and honors in school, worked hard at all my part-time jobs, and built an impressive resume, because I thought it would make me happy – except it didn't.

Ten years ago, I closed one of the biggest deals my firm had ever touched and watched as they congratulated my male superior, who did 1 percent of the work, if that, instead of me, who did 99 percent. I agonized over it for months, but after four years I finally decided to quit that job and buy a one-way ticket to Bangkok to see if freedom felt better than money. I didn't know if my dream of becoming a travel writer would come true, but one thing I knew for sure—I wasn't going back. I wasn't going to watch someone else get credit for what I did ever again, no matter what it took.

I had a small amount of savings that I started my journey with. I stayed in nothing but shared dorms, taking local transportation for pennies on the dollar, and eating only street food for a few years. I hitchhiked when I started to run out of money, hoping my blog might one day make enough money to sustain my travels so that I wouldn't have to go back to a cubicle.

I never thought I would be the person who liked strapping 55 pounds to my back and hiking through the wilderness without showering for days on end. I never saw myself standing on the side of the road in China with my thumb up hitching a ride. Over the last 10 years, I traveled solo through Southeast Asia, signing up for 10-day silent meditation retreats in Thailand, painting murals in exchange for free nights in hostels in Laos, eating delicious street food, and meeting amazing people to whom I still am close to this day. I have hitchhiked through two provinces of China, moved to Berlin, Germany, on an artist visa for over four years, spent a cumulative eight months on the African continent, and done several multi-day backpacking adventures by myself. Sometimes I look back on the girl in her early twenties who thought that her dreams should all revolve around climbing a corporate ladder and wonder what she would

right Golden hour on Rialto Beach, Washington State.

previous page Goodbye Earth, hello Mars. The first time I came to Utah, I had no plan at all. I just took a rental camper and went. It was back then that I realized dispersed camping and public lands were a thing and that you could just keep going forever and never run out of things to see and places to go, like the Bentonite Hills in this photo.







Sometimes I look back on the girl in her early twenties and wonder what she would have thought if she knew how things would end up—that she became someone who she never thought she would be.

left A selfie I took in Wild Willy's Hot Spring, Mammoth Lakes, California. I was about four months pregnant here and had to be clever with angles.

top The Philippines, one of my favorite countries to travel solo in. Southeast Asia is where I kickstarted my solo journey, and subsequently, my blog.

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I never thought I would be my own boss, writing a travel blog that is now read by millions of people each year. Each time it began by saying yes to something small, which then turned into something bigger, and it led me to adventures all across the world, covering over 60 countries that I visited on my own over the past decade.

That's not to say it was always sunshine and roses. There were bleak moments when it seemed like I'd have to quit it all, when my bank account teetered on the edge, and when I considered deciding that I'd had a good run, but it was over now. It took years of living on a dime, keeping the faith, taking writing jobs that paid the bills but ultimately underpaid me, and feeling like an imposter before I finally saw financial success.

But every time I reached those eleventh-hour moments, something would work out. I got a freelance writing job I'd applied for that paid \$600 per month, guaranteed for a year, and at the time, that was the confidence I needed to keep going. More opportunities followed, and eventually my little business grew. Besides, even though financial abundance and being recognized as a success is a nice part of being able to do this as my job, it was always about the freedom more than anything. One of the most important things I learned was that even though I wasn't the smartest person out there—and I wasn't the absolute best writer or photographer, although I was good—it didn't matter, because I had grit. I never wanted to give up.

I'm lucky that I met the love of my life at a campfire in Namibia and that we are starting a family. I know for sure that we will share our love of travel and adventures with our children, and I'll always feel glad that I took a leap of faith. I love the adventures that I get to have by myself, even though they're not so frequent these days, and that's totally fine with me. If the past 10 years have taught me anything, it's that it's never too late to take a leap of faith, and that there's almost always something better on the other side.

Stargazing in Hawai'i, one of the most popular destinations on my site.









left Beautiful Iceland. I led women's tours around the world, including Iceland. One summer, 16 of us hiked through Landmannalaugar over the course of two weeks—an epic adventure.

top Swimming with sharks in New Mexico. Being an avid scuba diver and free diver has not only opened up the underwater world for me, but also opportunities to work with tour companies and tourism boards to promote diving trips.

right Having a blissful moment in the Philippines.

next page left Being in the water with humpback whales is a life-changing experience I cannot put into words. I've done it at least five times now, and it never gets old. *right* In the past 10 years, I have gone from a finance girl to a badass woman who runs the biggest solo female travel blog in the English-speaking world. With a new baby and family, I am curious, optimistic, and excited for the future, and strive to continue living life fearlessly and adventurously.





