

Narrator 0:02
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Bruce Wallin 0:07

Are you one of those travelers who's always looking for that great new restaurant or that hidden away gem in every place you visit? Radha Arora, the President of Rosewood Hotels and Resorts is definitely one of those people. And we're going to hear from him today about his go to restaurants and secret spots around the world. I'm Bruce Wallin. And this is Travel That Matters.

Bruce Wallin 0:41

Hello, everybody, and welcome to Travel That Matters. This is the podcast where we explore the world's most exceptional and meaningful travel experiences. And we meet some of the fascinating people who make them possible. I'm extremely excited today to have Radha Arora, the President of Rosewood Hotels and Resorts as my guest on Travel That Matters. Radha is obviously a legend in the travel world. But he is so much more than that. I don't think that I've ever used the term bon vivant before and I'm probably butchering the pronunciation. But if there's anyone I know who fits that description, it is Radha. Radha is just as comfortable talking about vintage Porsches or Patek Philippe watches as he is about hotels and travel, no matter what subjects you're talking to him about cars, watches wine fashion, I can pretty much guarantee he will know more about it than you do. He also, of course, knows a thing or two about luxury travel, particularly when it comes to arguably the most important component of travel. And that is food. Radha has traveled all over the world. And he's dined and helped create many of the best restaurants along the way. We're going to hear from him about some of his favorites, some of his secret spots, as well as his philosophy about food, and fun. And of course, we'll also talk to him about some of the very cool hotels and resorts in the works from Rosewood around the world everywhere from St. Barts to Sao Paulo. So get ready, because this is going to be a really fun trip around the world that is guaranteed to make you hungry.

You've been everywhere, right? You've eaten very well everywhere and probably had quite a few good glasses of wine along the way. And I know that Paris in particular is a place that you know, well. It's like a second home for you. So tell us what is your secret about what's your go to restaurant in Paris?

Radha Arora 2:41

Bruce, I'm always mindful of sharing my experiences because I want them to be secrets. I don't want them to become a tourist haven.

Bruce Wallin 2:49

We'll beep out the names

Radha Arora 2:50

Yes, just bleep out the names. You know, I spent a lot of time in Paris. And I made sure that I visited all the sort of classic restaurants, the newer restaurants, and the restaurants that visitors like to go to. So there is one particular classic restaurant in Paris that I am in love with. I love

the team. I like the way they are so creative. When you talk about provenance, they actually, whether it's the beef, whether it's the vegetables or or whatever ingredients that they use, it's very local. And that's rare to find in Paris, because you know, normally when you talk about Paris, you talk about chicken saucisse or steak frite, blah, blah, blah, you know, or really heavy Michelin star restaurants. And that's not, that's not my preference today. So there is this restaurant is called Le Bon Georges. And it's a really lovely bistro with a very pristine atmosphere to bring your, you know, your daily chalkboard and they list out all the dishes. But the team the guy, owner, he's a former agricultural engine engineer, and so he wanted to create this restaurant. And I hadn't gone back for a year and a half but he's now created this whole new little nook where the chef is cooking for you tiny little table and they're having fun and they you know, they're being little Parisian. And I just love it.

Bruce Wallin 4:15

So I mean just the words bistro, tiny table, chalkboard menu, you know the those evoke, you know emotions in it right? I mean it makes me hungry just hearing those three things. And, and I like that picture that I mean it sounds like exactly what we're you know, many of us are looking for a great you know, look there's a time in place for the Michelin three star restaurant. But that is I think I think I've missed that more than the Michelin three star like that experience. Just popping in there.

Radha Arora 4:42

I agree. You know Bruce, his brother, big guy. You know as soon as I couldn't get off the car he's waiting for me haha mama calm, of course forget COVID. And then it sits you down and this service is so unpretentious is phenomenal.

Bruce Wallin 4:56

All right, we've gone with a classic restaurant. In yes, a classic dining destination everybody. Everybody knows Paris is a fantastic place for dining. Give us a destination that is a little a little more under the radar that you really don't want to share. But you're going to anyways,

Radha Arora 5:13

There is this restaurant and I'm sure you've heard of it , Da Vittorio is in Bergamo. It's a drive outside of Milan, it's a three star Michelin restaurant actually, but unpretentious in its food. They'll surprise you with things like, you'll be sitting down and having a martini, they'll bring bring out little mini hotdogs. Probably the best gherkin the best tomato sauce on it, it's just different. It's just different. And, and you can tell it's not your, you know, typical hot dog let's say, but they'll surprise you with these sort of mainstay dishes. And you know how they've put a twist on them. But I know you said you know off the beaten track a little bit, but in Rome is called Trilussa, and probably the best paccheri pasta, best ever. And it's just that the source is just perfect. It's not overdone. It's brilliant. It's owned by a family since 1910. When they finished cooking the pasta for your, whoever you're sitting with, they bring out the remaining pasta in the pan, and you eat from the pan. And it's just so authentic. And it's just great. And the two brothers who run it. I went there for the first time, maybe 10 years ago, I walked in, had this spark with them, really enjoyed the conversation. They wouldn't let me pay. And, and I

went back again, they wouldn't let me pay. Now I'm not talking about this restaurant because of that, but it is one of the mainstays of Rome, they do fantastic food, great wine list, and a very typical, authentic Roman destination.

Bruce Wallin 6:52

Are you that kind of dining or culinary traveler where you have a spot and you know, whether it's on Hong Kong or, or in Rome or Paris that you go, you're going to go back to Africa.

Radha Arora 7:01

For me, you know, look, it's not just about the food, it's the experience, and you long to go there you sit and talk to the restaurateur or owner, proprietor or chef, and you have that relationship, you have the relationship with the staff, because you know, anybody can go for a meal anywhere else. Here is your starter is your entrees, your dessert blah blah blah, here's your wine list boom boom boom done. No, it's not about about that, of course, it's the company that you're with, but it's the entire experience is so important to me.

Bruce Wallin 7:28

Okay, so staying in Europe here for a second. I know you just took a trip to Crete, I believe. Any discoveries there? What was that, like?

Radha Arora 7:38

When you arrive and you take this sort of scenic drive to the hotel that we're staying in, you know, you come across little fishing villages. And you think, well, that's a really nice town. I'm sure that's a great restaurant. And of course, that restaurant is right on the rocks. It's on the ocean front, and you feel the air and you know the fish is fresh. And you know, it's just what you long for, they don't care about look in the feel of the restaurant, it's more about that authentic experience. So we came across this restaurant is a typical Greek taverna in Crete, it's called Blue Door. It was actually a fisherman's little stone house before, which was sort of restored because it's blue door comes from a Greek islands where it was a very old tradition to paint the doors blue to keep the evil eye away from the household and bring the men safely back from the sea to their loved ones. So anyway, there's a little bit of sort of history to it. But also the fact that when you do think about Greece and you do think about this restaurant, you are looking for those blue chairs and the blue restaurant, you know, that sort of first arrival experience. You know, people always talk about no white tablecloth, no, I like white tablecloths, white tablecloths does not mean to say that it's a Michelin star restaurant. White table clothes means that, you know what, the proprietor is actually got to try harder than just to throw calamari in your face. So this particular restaurant while the food was just outrageous, and it was just that very authentic and undiscovered. You know, that's that's the other beauty.

Bruce Wallin 9:07

That is a huge part of this is discovering, discovering these places yourselves without someone else's guidance that said, we very much value your guidance here so what we want more.

Radha Arora 9:17

You know everybody's talking about you know, when when people go to Paris they always talk about certain destinations, Monsieur Bleu, you know, or the Paris Saucette restaurant, they own almost every other restaurant. But there's one particular restaurant called Giraf and everybody's talking about at the moment is on Trocadero overlooking the Eiffel Tower, what they've done, and I went there, you know, three, four years ago, but what they've done is they've taken space upstairs, and the view is outrageous. It's like Eiffel Tower is in your back garden. It's just extraordinary, extraordinary.

Bruce Wallin 9:52

Radha is obviously pretty passionate and has some pretty strong opinions about food. But it's clearly not just about the food for him. It's about the whole dining experience. So I asked him how that philosophy plays out at his Hotels and Resorts.

Radha Arora 10:08

I think what it is Bruce is the trust and faith in the people that we hire. And it's just, it's the essence of who we are as a brand, the people that we hire in any property that you take, if I was to sort of search through the our entire portfolio and see who does what from a from a culinary fair and and how they extend themselves and how they embrace the community, how they take Rosewood on the road, go to people's homes, take clients on journeys. In Mayakoba, typically what happens in is that once a week, the managing director, Daniel.

Bruce Wallin 10:42

I know Daniel Well, yes.

Radha Arora 10:44

What he's done is, over the years, he's, you know, they set up this sort of farm table, they invite the clients, they sit there, they talk, they play music, and they serve great food, and the chef Juan Pablo, who has a fantastic personality, what they've done is they've established these relationships. And when these clients do come back, they take them on the, on the road to, let's say, Oaxaca and experience a culinary fare there. And so why did they do that? I mean, it's not because Oh, it's business. They do it because it's very heartfelt. And they know that's what the client wants. Las Ventana's the same thing. They take you to different destinations within Mexico and meet local artisans. And the hotel team does that. Why? Again, because they know that when the guests come and stay with them is not just transactional. It's much more experiential, and lending their personalities to the guests.

Bruce Wallin 11:39

You mentioned personalities and you mentioned Juan Pablo Loza at Mayakoba. I have to tell you a quick, quick story. My quick story about Juan Pablo years ago when he was at Las Ventanas, actually, before Mayakoba. Yeah, I was there. It was the first trip I was taking with my now wife well, many, many years ago. And they invited us to do a cooking class at Las Ventanas. We show up at this cooking class. And here's Juan Pablo Loza, who looks like I don't know George Clooney or Cary Grant,

Radha Arora 12:07

Jorge Clooney as we call him.

Bruce Wallin 12:09

Clint, most charming, great looking guy ever. And here he is talking about how he learned to cook at his grandmother's knee, and all this stuff. And he's making us this incredible meal. And I'm sitting here thinking like, I think I'm I'm going to lose her right now. I think it's this is it like it was, he completely charmed both of us, by the way. So and I've I've seen him many times since it at Mayakoba. But he really does kind of encapsulate that for me, what you guys do, And it's like, he's a part of the experience.

Radha Arora 12:37

Yes.

Bruce Wallin 12:38

It's not just that his food is great. But like he really He's funny. He's dynamic. And, and again, his food is just all part of everything that he does, and that interaction. And those are the things you remember, right? You don't necessarily remember that specific taco.

Radha Arora 12:51

Yeah, exactly.

Bruce Wallin 12:53

But you remember everything that went around it and the experience you had.

Radha Arora 12:57

And you know, to your point, Buce, this is the beauty of the brand. We're a family and we banter we joke. And by the way, that happens, not just there. Be it in Hong Kong or in Paris or London, the relationship that we've forged with the team in allows them to be their own personalities, they feel safe and comfortable, to be able to come up with fantastic ideas. And Juan Pablo, you just know, he's confident in what he does. He knows what he's doing. It's not just that he's being jovial and being, you know, a great culinarian in front of you, but it's actually really thoughtful and is always coming up with novel ideas. I mean, he opened this new restaurant in Mayakoba called Zapote, and the food is phenomenal. And again, we have a chef in London and the Holborn dining room, for instance, she's actually created this pie room. And again, very typical British, of course, it goes against the grain today where people are being healthy and having vegan food and all that. But no, if you're going to a restaurant, you still need to be able to enjoy yourselves, of course. But here we are. We have the pie room. We're talking hearty pies. We're talking curried mutton, chicken with tarragon and mushroom, we're talking about pork pies. Things that are quintessential British

Bruce Wallin 14:16

Like give me an example, something like that. But like one moment where you you were at a Rosewood property or experience something and you were just like, okay, that's this is what it

is all about some kind of dining experience. It's just like, perfectly captured what it is that you guys are going for.

Radha Arora 14:31

I'm not sure if you've seen Arbol. It was created by Frederick and his team back three years ago. And of course, in when you go to Mexico you need to have Mexican food. But of course Las Ventanas has got a sushi and tequila library. You've got the grill and you've got also got the main restaurant but also what they did was they thought okay, we'll put in an Asian fare because you know, when you think about Asian cuisine, the spices and the, the ingredients, the herbs that they used and there's some similarities. So they created this Asian fare, which has been ultra successful and attracts people, you know, from the outside from other properties and within the local community of Los Cabos. And then I will tell you, Hong Kong, I mean, when you think of the restaurants that we've created over there, we've got the Legacy House, which is typical Chinese food that was very classic dishes, but a modern interpretation. And then we also had another concept in Indian food called Chaat and this this restaurant is just, it has lines for three months, and people are just waiting to get into the restaurant. We have a Spanish fare there as well. So we look at the audience, we see what the local community is looking for. And sometimes yeah, you take risk, and you say, okay, well, this restaurant concept on paper would not belong in in this destination. But, you know, you really got to understand your client, where they're coming from what they're looking for. It doesn't you know, if you go to Hawaii doesn't always necessarily mean that you're going to have poke.

Bruce Wallin 16:06

Well you know, actually, you know, being based in Puerto Vallarta right now, I've always been one. Like, if I'm in Mexico, I want to eat Mexican food, right?

Radha Arora 16:13

Sure.

Bruce Wallin 16:14

But when you're here for several months, you know, you'd like pizza, every once in a while. But I also think it's important to realize, you know, it's also changed my perspective. Um, you talked about the Rosewood Hong Kong, it's attracting a big local crowd right now. Right?

Radha Arora 16:27

Yeah,

Bruce Wallin 16:28

Like locals, sure they love their culinary traditions, everything, but they also like to have different styles of food. So I think it is important to kinda understand the destination as a whole, not just that specific culinary tradition, but how they embrace other traditions as well and and types of food and getting back to the dining destinations for a bit. What are some of the places that you see as emerging spots? You know, we've talked about Paris about Rome,

Hong Kong, Mexico, what are the ones that you see as kind of being the the up and coming culinary destinations?

Radha Arora 17:02

Looking ahead, you know, Croatia is one of those destinations that people speak of. And last year, I was lucky to be invited by somebody to go on a yacht experience up and down Croatia, it was just a lovely experience. And when I talk about this other experiences in Crete, and the places that we found, just by sailing and sending somebody out to scout these restaurants, on the beach, on the rock, just fantastic food, great local fish. People are lovely. So yeah, Croatia is one of those destinations because of the food because of these, these magical, still kind of undiscovered people talk about Croatia, but there are no certain destinations within Croatia that are still undiscovered and small villages that we would come to take the tender and then just go there, gorgeous.

Bruce Wallin 17:58

It is ripe for a Rosewood, I think but it's funny you bring up Croatia because I was actually in Slovenia a couple years ago and I think a lot of these destinations are kind of trying to position themselves as the next big dining destination. You know, I know Slovenia is really, you know, it's got a lot of the same type of terrain as Italy, a lot of the same ingredients, everything like that.

Radha Arora 18:18

Yeah.

Bruce Wallin 18:19

The food's not the same as Italy. You know, I think they're they're working on I think they're really trying to build up their it as a culinary destination. I think Croatia the same where it's kind of you know, look, it's a lot of the same ingredients you find in Greece, or in or in Italy. All the ingredients are there. And I think it's it's like we're gonna see these destinations emerging over the next several years.

Radha Arora 18:37

Yeah, and you're talking about those kinds of destinations. Another one that comes to mind, Bruce is Cartagena in Colombia. I've been to Bogota. I had fantastic food and beverage experience in in Bogota, if I'm not sure if you've been to the restaurants, but the scenes are magical. And I what I love about places like that is more tapas style they bring you to share. You know I hate this sort of plated courses. I don't know about you, but I love to kind of, when I look at a menu, I look at, okay, what have they got for the appetizers and salads? I may not, I may not even look at the entrees. I'll just look at appetizer, salad, order a few of those and share those and and get a real sort of flavor of the restaurant and the destination.

Bruce Wallin 19:18

So what is that in Bogota? Like what what kind of tapa style food are you, what are they known for in Colombia and what kind of stands out to you?

Radha Arora 19:25

It's more meat related and of course, right? And Colombians like their meat but the quality of the meat obviously how it's reared and how it's grown and how it's preserved makes a huge difference.

Bruce Wallin 19:39

You know, actually when we were looking at places to move temporarily Caratagena was definitely on that list. One of these places that's you know, extremely interesting from a cultural perspective, but then also has you know, just great beaches all around and places you know, islands that you can go off to, the food, everything about it. Very exciting destination and I agree with you, I think that's just going to get more and more open and interesting for travelers.

Radha Arora 20:05

And it just also came to mind. I do want to go to Uruguay, it's a place that I've not been to. I hear some great things about Uruguay. And of course, you know, Françoise what's his name Mallmann, he comes from Uruguay. The one time that I had his food, obviously not in Uruguay, because I've not been there in a place in Provence called Via Coste. The culinary fare that he's created is outrageous.

Bruce Wallin 20:31

We're gonna take a quick break, and we'll be right back to hear Radha's thoughts on St. Barts, Sao Paulo, and more.

Ad Break 20:36

Bruce Wallin 21:02

Welcome back to my conversation with Rosewood Hotels and Resorts President Radha Arora. I also had not been to Uruguay but I've heard great things about it. And of course about Mallmann's cuisine, but okay, of all the places that you have been, what is the one dining destination you recommend? What is your favorite place to eat?

Radha Arora 21:23

When it comes to food as the destination to go to? I think there's none better than Mexico. Because you can go light, you can go heavy, can do all kinds of things. You can spice it up and you don't have to spice it up and forget the tequila. And that's just a sort of icing on the cake, if you will.

Bruce Wallin 21:40

Well, I could not agree with you more on that front. Speaking of Mexico, I know you guys have a new resort opening just up the road from me at Mandarin on the Riviera Nayarit in a couple years. I know you also just opened the Villa Magna hotel in Madrid. What else do you have coming up? What else is in the works from Rosewood?

Radha Arora 22:00

Look, Bruce, we you know, we got, it changes. We're at 28 properties, 29 going on to 29 properties, we're opening a Le Guanahani as you know. So we're opening Villa Magna first. And then we go to open Le Guanahani in St. Barts. And we talk about great food destinations. I mean, St. Barts is not bad. It's ridiculously expensive. But also an amazing destination to go to fantastic restaurants and there's so much life and what what a great what a great island that is. We're particularly proud.

Bruce Wallin 22:31

French Caribbean just yeah, you're gonna get good food.

Radha Arora 22:35

Yeah, for sure. I mean, it'll cost you a penny. But, you know, more than more than your airfare to get to St. Barts, but still is good. And then when you talk about South America, we're going to Brazil, we're going to Brazil, and maybe toward the end of the year, beginning of next year in Sao Paulo.

Bruce Wallin 22:52

Now, is this, is this a historic building? Is this a is it a tower is it to describe a little bit of it.

Radha Arora 22:57

Right, so it's an old hospital, and that that was lying dormant. So it's an old building an old relic with a newer tower, added to it, by John Novell, the who's the architect, and we, and Philip Stark is the designer. And so the place is going to be absolutely stunning. Lots of culinary fares, and the artwork is going to be outstanding, all local artisans.

Bruce Wallin 23:21

And so you're gonna have people who were actually born in this building.

Radha Arora 23:24

Yes.

Bruce Wallin 23:24

Coming back to stay

Radha Arora 23:25

Yes.

Bruce Wallin 23:25

With us you guys as guests.

Radha Arora 23:27

Yes.

Bruce Wallin 23:28

There's a good story.

Radha Arora 23:27

Yes, a great story. And you know, we'll instead of live music we'll feed in sort of, you know, babies crying maybe as...

Bruce Wallin 23:36

And then what's next, I know you have a lot in like 2023 and beyond.

Radha Arora 23:41

The next opening would most likely be Vienna. Again, Austria is not one of those destinations where you, you know, go and eat food. But this is a very special place and very special location. And it's an old bank. It's in a conversion of an old bank with a fantastic rooftop bar. So Vienna, I'm very excited about again, it's one of those destinations that would not normally be on your bucket list, you know, but in this case, we'll have Vienna, then we have Amsterdam, we have Venice, we have Munich again, you know which brand is outside, you know, announcing properties in Vienna and Munich.

Bruce Wallin 24:19

Okay. Venice, Amsterdam. Vienna, Rome. Yes. Munich. I mean, these are big time, you know, European cities. Do you have anything like, you know, resorts coming up and you have St. Barts.

Radha Arora 24:32

Yeah.

Bruce Wallin 24:33

What else on the on the more resort front do you have?

Bruce Wallin 24:35

So from a resort standpoint, Mandarin is going to be one. But before that, I think we'll be opening our first property in Hawaii. We found probably the most authentic spot in Hawaii. If there was a spot where you got to sort of take a pen and put sort of you know, have a take a stab at it and say okay, this is the point where Rosewood needs to be. This is where going and it's called Kona Village. It's on the Big Island. And as you know, it was favored by Steve Jobs for ,for decades. And it was a place that he would always go to.

Bruce Wallin 25:10

It's a place that I think I know I'm very excited about this property and and it's a place that anyone who has been to the Big Island in the past however many years has seen that that you know, the old structures there the thatched roof that like wondered how on earth no one's done anything with that property, and it's such a spectacular location with such a great history. And it's very exciting to see that you guys I mean, there's a lot of great resorts in that area.

Auberge just opened you know, or recently opened or reopened the Mauna Lani, there's Haulalai. There's the Mana Kai so on and so forth. Like I love that part of the world.

Radha Arora 25:41
Yeah.

Bruce Wallin 25:41
But Kona Village, you know, has the potential to, it's just such a special location.

Radha Arora 25:46
It's special.

Bruce Wallin 25:48
Alright well, thank you so much for all your insights. It's been so great having you on today. Radha, I really appreciate your time, I look forward to continuing this conversation and seeing a lot of these great new properties and trying some of these restaurants.

Radha Arora 26:02
I can't wait.

Bruce Wallin 26:03
Take care.

Narrator: 26:06
And now for the Wallin wrap up.

Bruce Wallin 26:10
There's one thing that Radha said today that I didn't even think he intended it to be a major point, but it really stuck with me. And that was about multicultural food in international cities. And, what I mean is he was talking about the Rosewood in Hong Kong. And he was telling us about, you know, they've got a Chinese restaurant, of course, but they also have an Indian restaurant. They also have a Spanish restaurant. I think they have other restaurants. I think at first glance, a lot of us would say, well, you know, I'm in Hong Kong, I want to eat Chinese food. But the truth of the matter is, these cities are multicultural, just like New York City. Do we go to New York City for hamburgers and hotdogs. No, we might go for pizza, but we are going there for the multicultural experience of New York City and food is a huge part of that. International cities are no different. They'll all offered their own takes, of course have their own food traditions, but also on these many different influences that they've had over the years. And I mentioned, you know, Mexico, I have experienced that. Being here for several months, you're going to want to eat different types of food. But it's also been very interesting. Of course, I want my pastor tacos. I want my carnitas tacos. However, it's also nice to experience the different foods, the Asian foods, the European foods that have been brought over here by the people who have immigrated from those regions to Mexico. So next time you're in Japan, don't forget that great Austrian place for schnitzel down the street. And most important, keep an

open mind and keep on eating. I'd like to thank Radha for joining us today on Travel That Matters. For more information on the resorts, restaurants and hotels that we talked about today, please check out our show notes or visit Curtco.com. The show is produced for Curtco Media by AJ Moseley and Darra Stone. Music by Joey Salvia. I'm Bruce Wallin and we will see you down the road.

Narrator 28:16

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