

Designer India Hicks: Life Lessons and Lockdown

INDAGARE GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS | 1.01

Melissa Biggs-Bradley Hi and welcome to Indagare's Global Conversations, a podcast about how traveling the world shapes our lives and perspectives. I'm Melissa Biggs-Bradley of [Indagare](#), a company I founded on the belief that how you travel matters. I'm sitting down with some of the most inspiring and innovative people I've met while on the road. They are activists and conservationists, designers and filmmakers, writers, chefs and entrepreneurs. They will share stories about their travels and how they lead lives of passion and purpose. They inspire me, as I hope they will you. Welcome to the conversation.

As a passionate traveler, what I immediately miss the most when we first found ourselves in lockdown during the COVID-19 crisis was connecting with people. Because for me, the greatest discoveries, when I distill travel down to its essence, come from meeting new people and hearing new perspectives. And that human exchange can happen even when we can't get on planes. We can still tap out of our familiar lives and get a glimpse of a different one. And in the varied ways that people live, I see possibilities. So, I reached out to those I consider true global citizens, people who I've met in my travels, who've spent their lives seeking and exploring, which is, by the way, the meaning of the word *Indagare*. And whether they've fully immersed themselves in a destination or a discipline, or they've spent a lifetime moving between cultures and interests, they remind us of the many options of what life can be. So, I thought even while isolated we could continue to discover those infinite possibilities and learn from each other through conversation.

My first interview as part of our lockdown series is with India Hicks, who I caught up with in Harbour Island in the Bahamas, which she's called home for more than two decades. If you don't already know India, you may have first glimpsed her as a flower girl in Princess Diana's wedding. Prince Charles is actually her godfather. Her grandfather was Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India, and her father was the legendary designer, David Hicks. So, travel and design are part of her aristocratic lineage, but she has definitely blazed her own trail. I met India on my first trip to Harbour Island, where I went to write a story for the launch issue of *Town & Country Travel* magazine. India, who's modeled for Ralph Lauren, became our cover girl and she also became a friend. In this global conversation, she shares parenting anxieties, she opens up about founding and losing a beloved business, and she tells stories of her far flung travels. Wait until you hear about the favorite memento that she smuggled back from Africa.

MBB So, India, let's start with where you are right now and what lockdown looks like in Harbour Island.

India Hicks You asked where I was right now. I think the [inaudible] hopefully indicate that I'm here on Harbour Island, which is where I've lived for 25 years now. And it makes me think, my god, 25 years, how did we get there so quickly, cause as we all know, blink and it's happened. But I really spent every single year of my life in the Bahamas. I was very lucky to have this father, David Hicks, who was... eccentric. Let's put it like that. And very flamboyant and a genius with the way he saw the world. And he really set the world alight with his incredible passion for design. Everything around him was designed. And so, of course, when he had the opportunity to build a home in the Bahamas, he didn't do what everybody else did, which was just to have regular Caribbean home with a sensible pitched roof that would allow for the rainy season weather to drift off. No. He built an Egyptian mausoleum. Or it was inspired by an

Egyptian mausoleum. So, he built a house out of sand and cement. And it's got a flat roof. And it's very remarkable to look at, but it's *hell* to maintain. And just after he built it he thought I don't like the way the sand feels, and he never really came back. But my mother took us there as a family every year for Easter. So, I've lived here and raised my family for 25 years but grew up coming here every year. So, I truly feel the Bahamas is an adopted country for me.

MBB And what is it like? I mean, how is it changed in the last couple of weeks? When did Lockdown's start there, and what's the same and what's different?

IH Gosh, it's interesting because when we all began to realize what was happening and, none of us, I don't think anybody on this call or there talking with you, understood quite how deep this was going to go. My first reaction, when we got hints of it, was, I wanted my children back. I've got two kids in boarding school in England, and I've got a kid in college in Savannah. And I just knew no way I was going to be not -- I couldn't possibly function if I didn't have my kids here with me, regardless of whether this was long term or short term. And in fact, I think the schools anyone thought that I was slightly overreacting when I said I'm flying my kids home. We'll manage, we'll make it work somehow. And of course, they at that stage were not prepared online schooling or anything because I was, I was I guess, slightly panicking, but I wanted them home. So, they came home. So, we've been essentially as an entire family, all five of my kids are back here together for a month now, and in this past month, we've seen a number of different changes, as has the world. We all adapt. Each country is reacting slightly differently based on, I suppose, that needs, their bravery, their scientists, their advice.

MBB And what is it like on the island? How has the Bahamian government responded to the pandemic? What kind of rules have they put into place?

IH The Bahamas to begin with was a little more relaxed. It was still spring break time and the island still have many, many visitors coming in and out. And then they got tough. They got very tough, very quickly. And I applaud that. I think it's absolutely the right thing to have done. And in fact, it's quite draconian here at the moment. We have four days of the week where we are simply not allowed out. We're not allowed beyond the wall of our garden, if we're lucky enough to have our garden, or outside on the front porch of our home, and then we have three days where we're allowed out, but only to shop. We go to the grocery store, and then we have to come home again. And we are allowed a little bit of exercise. But we're not at the moment, on a day like today, even allowed to walk our dogs outside. Again, I think it's right. This is a country that does not have vast medical resources, nor would it be prepared for a pandemic. Understandably so, who would be? And so, they're taking very serious measures. Again, I think it's sensible and I think it's right. Here on Harbour Island, there is no confirmed case. There are now two other islands with confirmed cases. So, the government are taking it very seriously, and rightly so.

MBB And are people allowed to travel between the islands still?

IH No inter-island travel at all. And of course, you know, I share a lot on social media in the hopes that one can bring awareness and hopefully, you know, just explain how we're feeling. And it's a conversation we're all having. And I would say things like, you know, "I have a cat that needs to see a vet and people are so incredibly helpful and very engaged and send wonderful messages -- and thank you -- about what cat medicine I should be using or what -- what the answer could be. But people don't understand. There is no DHL. There is no Amazon delivery. There is nothing. We are completely cut off. To all intents and purposes. So, it has to be at-home remedies or some kind of answer, which again, highlights what happens when something gets serious here. You know, the island life, I think one of the, one of the nice things that you said about this conversation is going to be that sort of delights of island life and the

challenges of island life. And one of the challenges would be right now, yes, my goodness, I am so incredibly blessed and lucky and thankful that I am able to have [inaudible] and the sound of the ocean. And I know that there is a beach there, and I have space around me. But it's a risk that we took because, as we've said, there is no there is no serious medical situation that would be able to help if something happened. So, I keep telling my kids, please, let's not fall out of a tree right now, let's be serious.

MBB Are there certain things that you found that are helping you keep sane in this or that your family is adapting to different rituals to get through this?

IH Humor, I think is enormously important. And it has been amazing to see the response globally of each country's wonderful sense of humor coming out. And I think Italy really led that. And not only humor, but on the emotional side of supporting one another, of being neighborly, of feeling like a part of the community. And at the moment, exactly what we're doing today, I think leads to that. You know, Melissa, you and I just chatting makes us feel we're part of something. We're sharing something. So, I like that. In fact, it's one of the times where we're so thankful for social media, if we're using it in the right way. And in fact, my kids are on it more than ever. And I question it and I worry about that. And I think, as I'm sure many, many moms out there are worried, you know – what is the screen time, and should we be monitoring this more? And again, I think it's probably like anything. I don't have the answer, but I suspect balance is probably a good guideline. I don't mind so much that if my kids are needing to play videogames together right now, that that's their way of getting through this, then so be it, because it is a weird time. It is a weird time for my kid, who's 23 and just trying to launch a fashion brand. It is a weird time for my who's 12 and is beginning to have to homeschool. And she's asking “When does this end? When can I go back to school?” So, they all ask different questions in different ways. And I think as a parent and as an adult, we try to lead by example. And so, there are days where I have shit days. I had a shit day at the beginning of this week. And I think this week's been shit for a lot of people. I've seen a lot of #shitestdweekoftheyear, #shitestweekofthecentury. The fact that I wasn't in control, and that is difficult. Just not knowing -- when will the airport open up again? When will I see my mama again? When can I walk my dog on the street? All of these things. That's I think what we all of us are probably suffering from -- the unknown. But we are given guidelines. And what we do know is things we can do. We must stay home, we must flatten the curve, we must listen to the authorities, and pay attention and set an example. And I guess that's what I try to do. But I have shit days.

MBB India, I think we all have shit days, but it does help to know that we're not alone in that. And in fact, I think knowing that you're in company helps. I mean, I don't think you and I are the only ones having those days. And I think you're totally right, a lot of this comes from the not knowing. And the real lack of control is something that we're -- none of us were used to. So, you know, finding certain things that you can control helps. I mean, I keep saying to my kids, focus on the things that you can control to give you a little bit of a sense of order in this world where none of us has a clue when this is going to be over. So, let's get back, though, a little to how you ended up going from England and then living full time in the Bahamas.

IH As I said, my father built this amazing house, so we would come out here quite a lot, and then by some extraordinary stroke of good fortune, my sister had a friend called David. And I used to know David when I was growing up, and he would come and take me out from school. And I knew him at a distance for many years. And then by some extraordinary set of circumstances, he found himself out here in the Bahamas way, way, way, way back with a cousin of mine who he was introduced to through my sister and we, we... we had a brief encounter in Nassau, actually it was a very romantic moment. I was staying at Government House because my mother was there. And David was staying at Graycliff, and there was a

fundraising evening, and many people had come together to give back. And David and I had a moment... And then we didn't see it for nine years. I went out with a wonderful man, a Greek. And he went with many women, and then we -- and then we re-connected. I was down on Windermere and he was up here on Harbour Island managing a small hotel. And I came up to go scuba diving. And four months later, I was pregnant. We just have to fast forward to that, Melissa. And we said, "Oh my god". And I said, let's take it one day at a time. And we have, and we still remain unmarried, and we have five kids and we have too many animals, and we built a life out here, very unexpectedly, and nothing was planned or thought through at all.

MBB And there -- for a control freak, it's pretty amazing how it's turned out.

IH Yes. Yes And there definitely is that. And I think that life is a series stepping stones. And one of my kids is actually studying a film course at the moment. And he was talking to me about a TED talk that he had listened to, which is all about "what if". And it is amazing that, you know, if you don't actually challenge what's happening and just go with it, maybe, maybe actually there's a point to it all.

MBB Yeah.

IH So as a control freak, I'm trying to go with that at the moment.

MBB So you've had a lot of different career paths from modeling to opening the landing to opening India Hicks, your business, which is really a new version of a direct selling model. How did it sort of all these things build off of each other?

IH One thing led to the other. And I think that is, that is the wonderful path of life. I found myself here on Harbour Island, pregnant, pretty much alone. David was still working at the hotel. I knew nobody. An at that stage Harbor Island was much less visited than it is now. And year round, there were very, very few other families who were living here who were from overseas. And I found myself wanting to do more. And thank goodness I became very good friends with the owner of The Landing. And once they had been hit by a hurricane, she asked, "Would you like to help redecorate?" And then we realized that actually this could be a huge, big project! And so The Landing became a real passion project for us. And we really wanted to make it look as though it was taken back in time. We wanted it to feel very fitting to island life. And both David and I have always decorated in that way. We love dark wooden floors. We love bringing the outside in. And we love overhead -- we love - hopefully not too much air conditioning. Natural, natural elements. And so The Landing really was a passion project, and we got a lot of the history of The Landing itself, and the family who owned and ran it. And then from that I then again by chance, did a book about our island life and from the book, even though we're looking for a spokesperson and in fact we developed fragrances together. And then I found I had a real other passion, which wasn't just interior design, but also product design, and I really loved that. And I suddenly realized, my goodness, you can create a fragrance from nothing, just from the air and the smell of the ocean. And it's amazing what you can bottle and it's amazing the emotive journey of that. And then from there, I realized that there are other things that you could design. And then I realized I kept having babies and hold on there are five of them now. And life just got super busy, very, very quickly. And I began to work more and more off the islands, actually, as the kids, the kids got older. And it was finding, again, the balance. I took some of them with me an awful lot. And then when the opportunity came to build my own business, which was six years ago, I jumped at it, because up until then, I had had licensing projects where someone else was in control. And this was an opportunity, really, for me to earn something myself. And I think there had been a part of it, where I have been so lucky to have this extraordinary British heritage and my father's design eye, and everything that my mother brings as well. But island life gave me a chance to actually have my own voice and something

that really was my own. And so then to be able to build my own company, I felt I had got to the right chapter, that I'd had all of the right experience and it was just the right time. My god Melissa, did I have an amazing six years.

MBB And you really did have an incredible six years developing your e-commerce lifestyle brand. Can you speak about some of the most impactful moments and the biggest learnings from running an online retail business, especially a business that was truly an expression of your own voice and your own style?

IH I met the most incredible women and the part of the business was that each woman really owned and ran it on her own terms and in her own time. And I think the devastation of closing that business was not so much the loss of the business, but the loss of the idea, because what I loved was the freedom it gave women who were at home. And right now we see that more than ever, giving them an opportunity to do more. And so many these women were incredibly adept. And I learned so much from them as well: how to manage home life with a business and how to do your tax returns, and how to manage a team. And just extraordinary lessons in business. And so together, we all had the most amazing number of years and we created a lifestyle brand. And I love the product and I love the price point, and I love the luxury of it all. And I was incredibly proud of what we did. And I've never worked harder in my life and I loved every minute. And we laughed and we lived and we loved and it was devastating when it came to an end. But oddly, now I look and I see what's going on around us, and I think how difficult it would be for me now to be trying to cope with managing that business and managing home life under these circumstances. And so, I applaud all of those women, particularly because I do believe it's still so tough for women out there. I mean, I've seen it firsthand how men get founding quicker than women, and it still happens. But, you know, women will now be managing the home and still managing their careers and managing their businesses. So, my god, at this time, I'd like to be able to support any women out there who's doing that. In fact, I'm involved with a few small businesses moment and hoping to be able to support them with all of the experience that I had. So, yes, my heart broke when I closed my business. But what I've learned is very useful and hopefully I can share that with other young women entrepreneurs.

MBB And there's no question that you will. I mean, you obviously have you built much more than a business. As you said, it was a community of people who are really connected to a mission around empowerment that was much more than just a straightforward entrepreneurial enterprise.

IH I'm always cautious of the word empowerment because I think it's massively overused. But, god, we had fun too, and that is so key. And right now, you know, my god, we need to find that sense of fun wherever we can. So, you know, a lot of the women I worked with had the most amazing sense of humor and were coming back round to, what's keeping us going right now, it's humor. It's community, it's sharing.

MBB So I know you've also by living in the Bahamas, you have lived through lots of natural disasters, hurricanes. But the most recent one in 2019 was by far the worst, wasn't it? Can you talk a little bit about what that was like?

IH Yes, certainly. You know, I've lived in the Bahamas now, as I said, for a number of years, and we have experienced hurricanes in different shapes and forms and unexpected ones at different times of the year when you're not even thinking, you know, October, my god, I remember one came in October we thought, "Where'd this come from?" And we've had ones where we've had, you know, the roof of our guest house ripped off and we've seen devastation here on Harbour Island. But Dorian was unprecedented. Never in living memory has the

Bahamas seen such unbearable destruction. And you know, this this country is small and fragile. And what we saw with dark Dorian, ripped - ripped two islands apart to such a degree that people really have no idea where to begin again.

MBB And what was it like when the relief agencies began to arrive? I mean, that must have been a powerful moment of unity and togetherness.

IH You have the experience of relief agencies coming in. And I'd never been part of anything like that. And I was lucky enough to be on the ground here on Harbour Island. And so actually, there was a group, an amazing group of people got together and started going out to Abaco and just getting people out, because they been there for five days with no relief whatsoever. People were hungry. People were frightened. People had no homes. They had nothing left but the clothes they stood up in. People didn't have any formal identification of babies in their hands. They had they had animals scared and frightened. It was, it was a mess. And there was an amazing couple of days here on North Eleuthera, where there was there was an incredible effort, a lot of very, very good minded souls who managed to get six hundred people out. It's tiny compared to what was going on, but every one of those six hundred people, it probably made a difference and it made a difference to the people here helped me. And it opened our eyes to what we could do again as a community and a country.

MBB It sounds like there are many parallels between relief efforts and a coming together of a community after the hurricane and also now what we're seeing during this pandemic.

IH I think it's probably part of what we're seeing right now with the coronavirus that things greater than we can control are happening in the world at the moment. And we need to be cautious. And I think that, you know, global warming was part of why this hurricane was so devastating. And what happened was it just sat, I'm sure everybody knows only too well the reasons why it was so devastating. It sat, and it didn't move. And I think, again, as many people here very, very nervous and very aware of having gone through a devastating hurricane like that, and now having coronavirus layered on top. Well, what will happen to small countries like this? And so we need to we need to start thinking about that. And already there are groups of very concerned, good, generous people who are thinking, how are we going to be able to help the local community in different ways? Because if this lockdown stays in place, it's going to become very difficult for the communities here on small outer-islands to survive because this is a country that lives on tourism. So hurricanes and coronavirus are not good. But I also saw amazing acts of kindness and selflessness and that we have to be part of. And I met a remarkable man called Michael Capponi who founded a relief agency called Global Empowerment Mission, and I became part of their advisory board and I sit on that board today, and I still am part of it. And they are setting the example of how you can help not only in the aftermath of the hurricane, but also in a fire in Australia and also during coronavirus and they're there on the front line. But it's extraordinary what an agency like that can do and the relief they can bring. But you really have to look into and make sure you know where money is going, and make sure the founder is there, you make sure that their fingerprints are all over it, and that they're working this every single day. Because I've also seen a lot of agencies that aren't as effective.

MBB Yeah, I was actually going to ask you at the end, but I'll ask you now, since you brought the Global Empowerment Mission up. If there was one organization that you would want people to think about making a donation to, if they want to have a positive impact on the world, what would that be for you?

IH It would be, definitely, GEM, the [Global Empowerment Mission](#), and it's very easy to find them online and have a look, because they're involved in so many different places. Find what

works for you. Is it hurricane relief. Is it COVID-19 right now? Is it the fires in Australia? Is it saving the koalas, whatever. But I only like to be able to endorse something that I can really put my hand on heart and say, I know where that money is going. I know what they're doing it. That definitely is an agency that I would say they know what they're doing.

MBB Will you talk a little bit about your podcast and what you've been doing with your mother.

IH Yes, something light because we've done so much heaviness. The podcasts was, it was just, it was a fun idea. I closed the business and I wanted something that would be a slight distraction from the heartbreak that I was feeling. And my mother and I have spent a great deal of time together. We traveled together, we've laughed together. We share the same sense of humor. She's an extraordinary person because she's incredibly well read. She has really had a front row seat, many historical events throughout the world. She was with the queen actually at the moment, she was at that tree in Kenya and came down when the Queen – when it was announced that the King had died – and my mother went into a deep curtsy and their relationship changed forever. And my mother is an amazing example of just getting on with life. And yes, she had a very elite upbringing, and yes, my goodness, was she surrounded with a lot of luxury and a lot of comfort. But she's also suffered in many different ways. And people never really know or understand quite family dynamics or upbringings or what goes on within a marriage. And there are things that my mother has had to overcome, and I always looked to her as the example. But I started because I love Instagram. I love to be able to share and I love to be able to watch everybody else. And David always says to me, it's like a postcard. If we use it in the right way. It's like sending a little bit of news, because I live overseas, and I'm never connected necessarily to my friends. So we try to post a little bit of news through Instagram.

MBB So how did you start recording the podcast with your mom? It sounds like it grew very organically. And how did she take to the concept of being part of a podcast? I mean, I know your mom is in her 90s.

IH At first, I started doing these snippets of my mom talking. Funny stories that she has because my god, is she a good racket, her comedic timing is just perfect. So, I started doing tiny little fifteen seconds snippets of her and then it grew to one minute. And then I sort of – and then it grew, and then I realized how fascinated people were by that generation of that upbringing. And she now has 91 years of life behind her. So, she has a lot to say. So, I thought, why don't we start a podcast? She was very confused by the podcast. Why would anybody want to listen to her? It's all been said and written before. And I said, no, mom, people really are interested. And so the podcast is terribly informal. Literally, there's no there's no beginning, middle and end to it. We just sit and chat. So the podcast has been fun. You can find it on any platform that you like for podcasts – iTunes. It's just called the India Hicks podcast. It's not really the India Hicks podcast. It's really the Lady Pamela Hicks podcast because she is actually the star of the show.

MBB Well Lady Pamela is really mesmerizing to listen to? I mean, you get transported back in time through her memories of her teenage years and later. And she's amazing. But I want to transition also to another lighter topic, which is can you tell us what you're reading?

IH I just read the Lady in Waiting by Anne Glenconner, which is which is highly amusing and very thought provoking. And again, just an example of someone who kept going. And there are very funny bits in that. So Lady in Waiting, I would highly recommend.

MBB And what are you watching? I'm sure you, David and the kids have picked up a few shows while on lockdown as most of us have.

IH Well, we've all had to do Tiger King. But it is pretty sensational. Just because you think -- that that's Florida. That's just across the ocean there. That's going on. I also watched another amazing show recommended to me by a girlfriend called The Night Of and it actually came out a number of years ago, eight-piece standalone drama. But did you see it?

MBB Well, it's fantastic, isn't it?

IH Isn't it? And that shows how behind the times I am. Because I've only just watched it, but it was really good.

MBB And I have to ask, as someone who loves design and is an incredible decorator in your own right. What is your favorite memento that you've brought back from a trip?

IH Shark's jaw. Again, David and I were traveling in Kenya and we came across a market in the middle of absolutely nowhere. And there was that shark's jaw. We were just so riveted by it. I hate that it was kind of fresh. It was quite fresh. We packed it in a suitcase. I'm sure you're able to, nowadays, travel with shark's jaw in your suitcase. And we brought it back here to the island. And we we slightly measured the growth of our children by them holding the shark's jaw around a little faces and as they grow the shark's jaw would -- But anyway, the point of this is that don't actually travel with a freshly caught shark's jaw because your suitcase will stink for year.

MBB I don't know if vacations for relaxing is the number one priority is your cup of tea, but do you have a favorite destination for relaxing?

IH I don't do relaxing terribly well, so I didn't necessarily think I'm going to go there to relax. I think I'm going to Costa Rica because my kids can surf, and I love it... I love everything about Costa Rica. I think, I'm going to go to Iceland because of the - we can hike, and we can fish, and we can see whales and we can do all of that. So, I didn't really go anywhere to relax -- probably my bath.

MBB Well, that's a place we can still go. So, do you have a favorite destination for exploring?

IH You know, again, I've been very lucky to explore a great deal. Firstly, when I was modeling, I went around the world and saw amazing places that I would never otherwise have been able to see. And I took a year to travel myself backpacking. And I went to Burma, and Nepal, and again, amazing, amazing countries. And which really you need to just be traveling with a backpack for. And with David we've also traveled a lot. We tried to travel quite a bit with our kids as well. And life, I do see as an adventure that we need to take full advantage of. But I did do an amazing trip to Iceland. I mentioned earlier, but I didn't get to see enough of the country. And it really struck me that country I just felt there was something very, very, very powerful about it. What I love was we stayed in this beautiful, teeny, tiny little hotel called the Eleven Experience Deplar Farm. And just I mean, sensational, absolutely sensational. The surrounding views, everything about it was sensational. But, you know, you have a wonderful, wonderful girl who is hostess-ing it and she'll show you to your room, and she's very attractive. And then she's there also showing you what you'd like to eat for dinner. And then you realize that she's actually an Olympic ice skier. Everybody in Iceland has all sorts of different jobs. You're an Olympic champion. You're also working in a hotel. And I love that about it as well. It's a tiny, tiny country. Tiny community. And just amazing people.

MBB OK. And when lockdown's over India, what's the first place on your travel wishlist?

IH To... to get back to England to go and see my mom.

Melissa Biggs-Bradley I had such a wonderful talk with India. I want to thank her for taking the time to sit down with me. And I'm so excited to share more of these conversations with you. Be sure to catch our next episode where I speak with my dear friend and Omega Institute co-founder Elizabeth Lesser. She's not only advised Oprah on her Super Soul Sundays, but she literally wrote the book on new American spirituality. In the episode, she offers advice on coping during challenging times, harnessing the good in grief, and how to bring a better world into being for ourselves. I hope you'll join us.

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