

## 02052014 Bianca Dominican Republic

*This is the Destination Entrepreneurs Podcast with Hugh Whalan, session number one.*

*Welcome to the Destination Entrepreneurs Podcast where we share the stories of everyday people who ditch their 9-5 life to set up profitable businesses in exotic locations around the globe. Now, here is your host Hugh Whalan.*

HUGH: Hey, hey, thank you for listening in today. I'm really pumped and I'm pretty excited that this is my first episode in the Destination Entrepreneurs series. I've got a great interviewee lined up, and she's got some fantastic stories to tell you. Before we get into her story though, I'd like to take a brief moment to talk to you about Destination Entrepreneurs, what they are, and why they matter to you. Each podcast in this series I'll be sharing the unique, compelling story of an everyday person who's taking a risk to follow their passion. And they're doing it in some of the most beautiful places in the world. I'm talking about stuff like beach bars in Bali, safari companies in the Serengeti, and massage practices near Machu Picchu. Most of the time, as you'll see, the single most important thing they did was actually deciding to do something and then following through. It sounds simple enough, right, but difficult when push comes to shove. The really exciting thing though about the people you'll be listening to is that they typically have no business experience, they typically have very little money to their name. And they'll be the first to admit that when they started they absolutely no idea what they were doing. And that's great news, because it means you and I are capable of doing exactly the same thing if we care about it enough, and if we have the willpower to follow through.

So what gets these people out of bed every morning? What makes them tick? And it's not that much different from you or I, I think you'll find that everyone has a slightly different version of the same answer. And that is, life is too short to do anything other than what you really love. And life is even better when you're doing what you really love in a beautiful, exotic location. As Ferris Bueller, one of my favorite people of all times said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." So I hope to share great, interesting, fascinating stories with you, but above all I hope these stories and people I interview will give you that little extra shove you need to get out there and do what you really love.

All right, let's jump into it. Today we're speaking to Bianca Forzano, an Italian living in the Dominican Republic who loved kite surfing so much that she figured out how to start two businesses around it. She now loves her life, spends a lot of time on the beach, and is buddies with Richard Branson. Let's figure out how she did it. We join Bianca when she's telling us about her life in Italy before she made the move to live in the Dominican.

BIANCA: Actually I can say that Bianca's life was really good on paper, because I was living in Rome and I love this city, I was living in the center of Rome, right in the center, with great friends, and my boyfriend, and great job because I was a manager for a big corporation. And I was successful finally, and it was everything I wanted from my life at the

beginning. Or maybe now I can understand it was everything I thought I wanted from life. But finally in the last year or maybe in the last two years, it took me a long time, I realized that actually there was something wrong inside that I could not hear before, but now I was starting like feeling more it was something that I was not really happy, or while I was thinking about my future I didn't see me always in the same path because many things were lacking, I was feeling the lack of many stuff that I really loved. Especially my freedom, because I always was a good worker, but I didn't feel that – even if I wanted to work – but my freedom to express, to do what I was doing in my way, this was my worst nightmare.

HUGH: And so that feeling of missing something drove you to do something adventurous, right?

BIANCA: Exactly. Si. But it takes time, it's not easy to realize, because after I did it I said, ah, it was just this I had to do that. But it took me maybe one year only or a little bit more to understand that I had to change. Because you know you are starting what you do, because you think, ah, I have constructed so much and what can I do now? I can destroy or start from the beginning. You're so scared of this. You know I can go to the thing I did and I did great. It's the fear of change, you know what I mean?

HUGH: Yeah. So you took, was it a year off?

BIANCA: I took six months for the beginning, and there was sure just taking six months, I was, okay, I can take six months' break, thinking about that, enjoying what I love and then I will come back and work quiet and happy.

HUGH: And what did you do over those six months?

BIANCA: I started traveling for kite surfing, I wanted really to do kite surfing that I love since ten years, and I went to Mexico in a place especially to do kite surfing. And it was a big adventure, because it was a new experience for me. I travel a lot usually while I'm working but for holidays, now I was leaving the country, so it was totally different, so I started to find a house, find friends, learning the language, because I didn't know Spanish, and then learn another language, other culture, it was amazing, I was so excited about that. I was happy every day. Even if I had no clue on what to do on my life, still because I was just wondering, maybe I cannot come back to the work. But I was so happy about the adventure.

HUGH: Did you spend the entire six months in Mexico kite surfing?

BIANCA: Yes I travelled around a little bit, Mexico and around Guatemala, Belize, but basically I was in Mexico.

HUGH: Oh fun! So you had a great time over those six months, what did you do after the time was up?

BIANCA: Actually during the six months I took my certification of kite surfing, I didn't know why at that moment, because I was just feeling that as I love it so much I could be an instructor, I didn't realize that I wanted to be an instructor or maybe I could do really that. So I did that, then I came back to Italy because that was the first plan to go back to work, but then I realized that I was enjoying much more my new lifestyle and I could do something different. Because at the beginning I didn't see that it could be another option. My only option was my first life. And then I didn't see that there was another option, and this was like a window on the world because actually if you think you can do

whatever you want, but just you're in a past and you don't see the other possibilities. So I say, okay I want to stop my job, and I will try to do something different, and something that I really like and that I can enjoy every day. Not working all my life waiting for some two weeks of holidays or something like that. Now my life is a holiday.

HUGH: This is really a reoccurring theme with the people that I talk to, they have quite a good life wherever they live. You had a great job, you worked for companies like PWC, which most people out of university would love to get a job with, and it wasn't making you happy. Was there a moment in which you realized this isn't for me or was it that entire six month period? What gave you that shove to feel like you could do this?

BIANCA: I think it was the whole six months, because it was not something that I thought about, but I started feeling it. So after six months I was enjoying my freedom and I was seeing a lot of people doing different stuff, not the normal job that maybe in the first world countries we are used to or we learn about that you have to do the career and everything. So I met a lot of people that were doing really what they were loving in exceptional way. So I started realizing that there is another world around, so outside there is something different. It can be and I met many people doing the most incredible thing, from yoga teacher, to having a pizzeria, to be coaching online, I met many many people living their dream.

HUGH: That's interesting. So the exposure to people who were doing the kinds of things that you're actually doing now was what opened your mind to the possibilities?

BIANCA: Exactly, definitely.

HUGH: That's great, because by exposing people to stories like yours I'm hoping to do something similar. And hopefully they don't need to spend an entire six months in another country to get there. You ended up getting your certificate in kite surfing as an instructor, did you end up starting a business around that?

BIANCA: Yes, but this happened later, because after I decided to quit my job, I said okay so what's next? I really loved Mexico, but I wanted to visit Cabarete where I live now in the Dominican Republic, because it was the most famous place for kite surfing. And I said okay let's go there and do some kite and then we'll see, I can be an instructor there, and then we'll see. So I arrived here, landed here and I started to work as an instructor. First of all with a girlfriend that I met online, she has a school here so she introduced me in this world, the teaching and everything, and then ended up to have my own business. So I'm a freelance now after years, I teach, I have some assistants, Dominican guys that help me, and it's like a dream. And now I have old people coming from Italy connected to me and they come here to make their holiday package. So they come here, they have accommodation, they learn kite with me, I go with them for a tour and everything. So it ended up step by step. I started like an instructor and after a couple of months I was doing my own...

HUGH: Was it hard to start your own business? Was there a process to it or was it just one day you started getting paid to do it?

BIANCA: This one was no so hard because it happened, because I started having so many connections from Italy and people arrived, so it was just making some little investment using my own kite, and it was more difficult to find good people helping me, like the team is really important. So I have one especially nice Dominican child – he's not really a

child, but in the age that they can start working – so after school he comes and work with me. But now it's many years so I found great people, and I found contacts, but this was not so difficult, because we don't have to sit up and be company or company. So it started slow and it arrived.

HUGH: How much of your times does that company take up at the moment, how many years have you been running it?

BIANCA: Now it's like four years, and now it is organized and I have many contacts, it takes me just the time of teaching kite and doing the stuff around, because I organized the first year, making some publications in magazines in Italy and connecting with people, and these I write especially word of mouth. So it didn't take me a long long time to structure it. I just have to work physically with people teaching, and this takes me two or three hours a day, but it's really work, it's really with my presence, it's not other back office work, this one not much.

HUGH: Interesting. So your networks in Italy were the initial drivers of your business in the Dominican Republic kite surfing?

BIANCA: Exactly. Some here and then some connections in Italy, and then the language helps because I speak other languages so I can have more students. And also maybe now I don't have a lot of related specialist of that, but I have a blog and so I publish pictures, sometimes I write articles, so I think these help indirectly this business.

HUGH: Let's explore for a minute if somebody's listening in and they love the idea of kite surfing or something similar, and they like the idea of setting a business up and recruiting friends and family and connections wherever they live to be their first customers, which sounds like a wonderful idea, how do they do that, how did you do it?

BIANCA: I think the important is that now online you can do whatever you want. So if you set up a simple thing to explain what you do, instead of having the old flyers around, you have your page explaining who you are what you do, and then start connecting and share with all your channel online - if you are far from them - channel online to expose yourself. So these help a lot now in the last years.

HUGH: So I imagine after four years your kite surfing business probably gets referrals from people who've already been a customer. But initially it sounds like most of your customers were directly as a result of your marketing efforts?

BIANCA: Yes, in the beginning yes.

HUGH: How long after you set up that first kite surfing business did you go into your second business, tell us a little bit about that.

BIANCA: It was around after one year I was doing just kite, and not only instructor but you know after you do your stuff you meet great people around your operation and business. So I met with another girl, an old champion, that's made me ambassador for a non-profit organization that improves girlie kite, so it's about working a lot with camps for girls. So I think more important with girl and this kite world but more around girls, it is usually is a world more masculine.

So I started that and after one year I was doing some camp and kite instructor. I started doing some bikini, but in the beginning it was just for trying, for fun, because I really like fashion I say, I'm Italian and Italian fashion I really like and I always was— not a deep

deep but I enjoy the fashion. So I started doing some bikini, combining my Italian fashion style with my sport and what I love, because I realize that girls that do this sport don't have some bikini that's really good for doing sports. So I knew the needs of the girls and I combined these technical needs with the fashion and I started doing something. But it was really a trial and I started sending it to my girl friend and friends of friends and doing some shows because a friend was inviting me to make some fashion show and introduce my bikinis. And the first year really that I was working in the bikini, it really started like a game.

HUGH: I can understand how you can market online to friends with your kite surfing business. It seems much more complex to me to be able to manage a bikini business which is physical products from Dominican Republic. So how do you do that?

BIANCA: This is totally different, because the kite is something that you do physically every day, but this one you have really to make on like a company, it's a real company, even if it's a little company but it has all the steps that all the company has, so you have to think about the production, the sales, the marketing, the finance, so it's everything. But if you think about everything you're scared, you have to start little by little. So after one year I decided I loved that, I was enjoying it, so I wanted to make a real company. So I started step by step doing all the stuff, the administrative side, the production that I do in Italy, so there you need to be more structured and need more people, because you cannot do everything by yourself.

But really the most important thing how I started, I really had no clue. Yeah I had been to business school, so I knew about everything, but in theory. But when you have to do that it's different, and maybe you think, no I will fail, how can I do by myself all this stuff. And the most important thing that helped me was that I asked some friends for counseling, for help, for everything. Because in you network usually you have people that know to do a lot of stuff. Especially in Cabarete it's great, because there is a big community of people from all over the world and doing all different things, so I asked really everyone, like for the production counseling and for the marketing, because I have some friend that are really good at marketing online. And so when you ask a lot you receive the counseling from someone, someone who worked with me, someone who trained with me, have different inputs. But I ask everyone from family and friends help. Help of work not just help you know.

HUGH: Yeah. And you mentioned Italy, how much time do you spend in Dominican Republic versus Italy?

BIANCA: I spend around seven months here and the rest in Italy.

HUGH: Nice. And the businesses that you run pay for your lifestyle?

BIANCA: Yes. Now yes. At the beginning – well also at the beginning – because at the beginning I really had to make my budget more little for my daily life. It sounds like difficult, but it's difficult if you live in Rome and have to change your budget life definitely. But in the Dominican Republic you can live on the beach in a little house, don't buy big brand for dress, don't go to expensive restaurants, it's different. Like your needs change and so your budget changes.

HUGH: And it was an investment in your future, because now it sounds like you're perfectly set up?

BIANCA: Exactly. Exactly.

HUGH: So what has been the most surprising thing about running your own businesses in the Dominican Republic?

BIANCA: Actually the most surprise for me is that I can do it. Because at the beginning you are overwhelmed, like they say, you think no it's too much, if you think about all the projects you think no I cannot do it, it's too much for me, how can I start and everything. But after you start doing it piece by piece, you think, wow, I can do it. It's great and then you can keep going because you never finish. Now I'm not at all disturbed, my business is growing, I'm always fixing something, I'm going in other countries now for selling all the time. You think I can do it and step by step you're move confident that you can do it. And also it's fun, because actually this is the first time that I worked and I had fun while working.

HUGH: It sounds like a lot of fun [laughs]. What are the challenges, it sounds like you work with Dominicans both on the kite surfing and your bikini business, what are the challenges in finding good local staff.

BIANCA: This is difficult. It was at the beginning difficult, not because it's worse or better than first world countries or Italy, but it's just different. It's like you're used all your life to live in a way, to interact with people who think like you, and the system is this one, and then you have to interact with people that speak another language, not just the language, but speak like in another world. They are totally different, so their priorities, their approach to life, how they work, it's totally totally different. So if you start and you want to use your method in another place, it doesn't work at all. And in the beginning it didn't work at all, because you're used to words like efficiency, organization, optimization. No, you have to forget it and understand how they do it, because you have to interact with people totally different. The approach is totally different. So my Italian approach or big corporation approach was totally wrong.

HUGH: How long did it take you to learn how to manage Dominicans effectively?

BIANCA: You never learn totally, because you always learn, but I think after a couple of years I'm really used to approach them. And what helped me the best, it's strange, but it was working with these Dominican kids. Because the kids are really pure and in the beginning you think wow they're crazy what they're doing what they're saying, but then – yeah, it's the best way of learning their culture, because they're more pure and they really understand how they are used to growing up, how they grow up, how they are used to thinking about things. And sometime I realize– in the beginning I was accepting them when I started knowing them after the mistakes. Now sometimes I adopt them if they're right for something, so me I am learning from them.

HUGH: So you have the kite surfing and the bikinis. One is local, and one is what I consider quite global, even the way you produce the bikinis is over a couple of countries. How do the different businesses impact your lifestyle?

BIANCA: Actually even if the main mode is the same, because it's the ocean, my love the ocean, kites and girls and everything like fashion, it's totally different, because one is day-to-day life, I have contact with people and I teach and I meet great people, and it's totally different, it's like sharing your knowledge and your enthusiasm with people. The other one is like working in a company, but it's your own company, so it's more structured, it's

more online— not always because also I have the production, I have the marketing, I do the photo shooting, I have other stuff, it's not just online, but it's like working in a structured company. So the approach is totally different. The other one, it's great, I really love also teaching, because you teach and I love sharing with people and teach my knowledge, but especially you teach something that is fun for them. So you see people happy, so it's really great. But it's different, it's more relational, and it's more daily life. The other one, no, it's a company.

HUGH: And the kite surfing, does that allow you to connect with the community you're living in on a deeper level in any way?

BIANCA: Definitely. They always say that usually when you live everyone lives in his own bubble, it depends, maybe it's the people from your area or the people from your school and everything, and then there is the bubble Cabarete, where people are connected because of the lifestyle, their love for the sport and everything, so it doesn't matter the age, the religion, where you're from, the country, nothing, your language, it's like a deep deep connection, because all people living here are staying here for a while, they're connecting from the same passion and lifestyle and deeply thought. So it's really strong here the connection.

HUGH: When you told me about what your average day looked like, I was really jealous [laughter]. Tell me about what your average day is.

BIANCA: As I told you, my priority quite changed, because for me it's really important to spend my time in the water. I love kites, and since I'm Cabarete I learnt how to surf, so I'm sure that every day at least I can surf or kite. So every day I have to spend a couple of hours in the water. Usually here in the morning you can surf, and in the afternoon because of the wind you can kite. So I do both, not every day, but I try to do at least one every day. So if I surf in the morning, in the afternoon I give lessons of kites when I have a student, or I work on my laptop. And if not, I work in the morning and in the afternoon I give kite lessons and then I kite by myself.

HUGH: It sounds like a very touch life [laughter].

BIANCA: Perfectly. I work 24 hours, don't make fun, 7-7.

HUGH: And it really sounds like you fell into these businesses because they were a part of your passion for things. Did you do at any stage research into whether a kite surfing business where your living was a good business idea or whether there were already a dozen extreme sports, bikini clients out there, or was it a more organic...?

BIANCA: Organic. For the kite it was totally organic. For the bikini starting organic for sure, but now yes I have researched, not if it's good or not good to do it, because it was organic when it started and I wanted to do it. But more my research is how to make the marketing, analyze the competitors, where they sell, how they do it, which ones they are, and everything. But not in order to decide if I do it or not do it. This one was organic. But now to organize it better, yes, it's a like a company so I make research and everything.

HUGH: What advice would you give people who are stuck in a similar position to you, they're probably living a great life still, but they feel like something's missing?

BIANCA: If they feel that something is missing, it means that something is missing. So first of all we have to analyze and be honest with ourselves that something is missing. And really honest, when I mean honest it means that it is not easy, because sometimes we're stuck because we think about what the other one wants from us, what the system wants from us, what the other family wants, but actually we have to be honest and realize what we want. This is the most important thing. When you realize what you really want, it doesn't matter the others. So even if the other people think you're crazy it doesn't matter, because if you're more happy, it's your life. So once you understand— it is not necessarily changing totally your life and go to other side of the world, but maybe you can make little change that makes you more happy.

And believe that everything is possible, there are other possibilities. Because when you are stuck, I see from my experience when I was stuck in my life and I was no more happy, I didn't see other possibilities, because you're inside a box, you want to open your eyes and see what's possible. Nothing is crazy because you believe just in yourself. And then things start happening. Once you go in the direction you like more, things start happening. I don't mean that it's more easy, because you can have practical difficulties, but then you're more happy, so the practical things you can manage.

HUGH: What should they do, what should these people do to get to the point where they're on that journey, on that path? For you it sounded like it was the six month trip and it was a process rather than a aha moment. But is traveling around for six months the answer for other people, or what's your take on it?

BIANCA: No, I think they just have to listen to themselves to what they like. For sure, seeing other experiences gives you more power, you feel more secure, you see that other people do that. What you're doing I think is great because you give the opportunity to people to see what I didn't. So once you see, you realize that you're not crazy, there are other people like you in the world, and maybe you feel more safe. And so then you just have to listen to yourself to understand what you like. Seeing that other people can do it is great because you don't feel alone and crazy man or woman or girl around the world, you're not just the only crazy. And it's not crazy, people maybe think crazy, but it's the only one that feels something like that.

HUGH: And there were times I've got to imagine when people, probably close personal friends and family, told you that you were crazy?

BIANCA: Yeah, it happened to me too at the beginning. But then people who love you accept you in any case. Maybe they take time for sure, also my family took time, because they're more conservative, traditional, so they were saying, "What are you doing, you're an engineer, and you teach kites? What's wrong with you?" You know for parents it's even more difficult because they're older and everything. But now one of my business partners is my mother and the other one is my sister, so imagine. My sister helps me in the marketing and my mother makes all the logistics.

HUGH: That's a great story.

BIANCA: So it takes time but it arrives.

HUGH: Was there a point at which you felt totally defeated and wanted to pack it in and go home?

BIANCA: Ah, it happens. You feel like you're failing, you mean?

HUGH: Yeah, you feel like you're failing or you feel like it's not working, and it always easier to go with the flow, right?

BIANCA: No, it's not easy, definitely, because there are moments, you're going a moment up a moment down. And so sometimes me too it happened to me, I said, what am I doing really, maybe my mom is right, I am engineer what am I doing in the Caribbean teaching kites and all? But then they are just moments, everyone has these moments, even if he is working in a corporation. So it's just a mood, sometimes things go wrong and you think, oh my God, everything will be wrong. But just keep going. Because the bad moments are everywhere. It's not that if you work in the low firm there are no moments like that. So maybe you can have different moments even working in a big firm, that I would be happy and free and I'm not, so what am I doing? The same here, so just keep going, it is just moments, they keep like a moment and then the day after you wake up better. Or ask for help, when you have this moment you can speak with people that can give you a good word and maybe see in a different way your mood and everything.

HUGH: You must have met some really interesting people? Do you have any celebrities or anything like that coming to you through any of your businesses?

BIANCA: Celebrity? Oh, I met my favorite celebrity in the world. I meet him when he comes here, the most addicted kite surfer in the world, Richard Branson.

HUGH: Oh really?

BIANCA: Si. And he is my guru for sure, he is a really wonderful man. You cannot even imagine. He's not just wonderful in business, but he's really a wonderful person. I met him personally every time he comes, often he comes twice a year, and I assisted him, I was lucky to assist him because he kites but he preferred going with someone if something happens. And he is really a great great person. Simple and honest and happy and with a lot of sensibility for the other people is great. He was my favorite star.

HUGH: Wow. So do you want to give a plug for your bikini line? And for you kite surfing business?

BIANCA: A plug?

HUGH: Yeah, a plug, sorry. A plug means would you like to say some things about your bikini line that I can include in the interview and then I can also include links and so on in the transcript that'll go on the website?

BIANCA: Yeah, for sure. Everyone can have a look for sure to my bikini site. And if they want to give me feedback, I'm always happy, my bikini line is on [www.biancabikinis.com](http://www.biancabikinis.com), easy. My name.

HUGH: That's good, it's very alliterative. It sounds good.

BIANCA: And also my blog that I started now even to work more on it, because every people follow me on my other channel and I want to introduce more articles on my blog, and it's biancaforzano.com, easy. If you want to write to me, contact me, ask me something or give me feedback or whatever, open blog.

HUGH: Awesome. Be careful what you promise Bianca.

BIANCA: Oh my God! [laughter] Now it's a big responsibility. But actually my blog now is more for kite and bikini, but I want to write some articles if I'm inspire to people or questions from people about this kind of life. Because many people ask me about that. So why not be an inspiration if you can help someone else.

HUGH: So Bianca, I will let you go but you'll be hearing from me, you'll probably be sick of my by the time this gets up and running. Thank you so much for your time.

BIANCA: Thank you.

HUGH: And that's all we have for you today. Thank you so much for listening in. If you like to enjoy this podcast, feel free to leave a review at iTunes, it helps with searching and it helps to get my podcast in front of other people who might be interested. Until next time.

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