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# The Palestinian YouTuber Bridging East And West With Travel Videos



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I travel for love and to break stereotypes



Nadir Nahdi

As a YouTube star, Haifa Beseisso wants to [\[+\]](#)

When she was 22, Haifa Beseisso landed her dream job: being paid to travel the world.

A fresh graduate from the American University of Dubai's digital production and storytelling program, the position was supposed to be all that she wanted in life; she'd even used social media to petition her idol Ahmad Al-Shugairi to land the gig. Touring Asia, she visited nine countries in a month and half, but there was one thing missing.

She wanted to be on camera.

However, Beseisso was told that the only way she could be on television was if she took off her hijab and spoke a Gulf dialect of Arabic.

Not one to follow the crowds, she decided to make her own travel television show on YouTube. She would speak in both English and the Palestinian dialect of Arabic, using subtitles to translate from one to the other, so that audiences all over the world could follow along. And she'd most definitely wear her hijab.

## Fly with Haifa was born.



Aqib Anwar for Gibsterg.

*No matter how far she travels, Haifa Beseisso likes to have fun. Photo credit: Aqib Anwar for Gibsterg.*

Although many associate the word hijab with the head covering or veil worn by some Muslim women, in reality, the meaning is much broader and encompasses a

religious code that dictates how both men and women show their devotion to God.

Beseisso herself describes the hijab as her best friend and connection to God wherever she goes. She enjoys that it is a conversation starter while she is traveling and likes being seen as a positive representation of her faith.

See, for Beseisso, her YouTube channel is more than just entertainment: she hopes to spread love and bring the world together.

An Epic Trip to Zanzibar | يانا الهوا من زنجبار



“A lot of people in the beginning didn’t get, they were like, ‘why are you speaking English? We are all Arab here,’” recalls Beseisso. “But I always had a vision and a dream of being a bridge and in order to do that I needed to speak in English.”

Although it is very costly and time-consuming to feature both Arabic and English subtitles in all her videos, it’s imperative to her mission.

“ I travel for love and to break stereotypes 🐦 ,” says Beseisso. “Arabs are more similar than different... it is not just what you see [on the news].”

A Palestinian who was raised in Dubai, Beseisso has been straddling international boundaries her whole life. When she created her show, she wanted to celebrate cultural exchanges and let people know that they shouldn’t have to change themselves to follow their dreams.

## Building a career on YouTube

The first year of her YouTube career, she was broke and her family helped support her, something that she is still thankful for today. But now it's been nearly four years since [her first video in Japan](#) and the 27-year-old has no signs of stopping.

The Canon ambassador for the Middle East, Beseisso estimates that around 85% of her income is from campaigns with brands like Dove, Lipton and Pandora. She also does voice-over dubbing and MCes events. YouTube ad revenue is constantly changing, so she can't just rely on it.

A career highlight for the millennial was the [2016 Nobel Peace Prize Concert](#), where she met Conan O'Brien as well as the Crown Prince and Princess of Norway. Beseisso was the [first Arab YouTube presenter](#) and host, interviewing stars like Iona Pop and Sting for the event.



## Getting married... to life

Known for her fun and socially relevant videos, she recently garnered international headlines for getting married to life. She first came up with the idea on a three-day silent retreat in Bali, Indonesia, and then, after meeting Malala at the YouTube Creators for Change event, decided to make a video.

Traipsing [around Dubai in a white dress](#), she goes to the beach, rides a roller coaster and takes photos with tourists. Although she hopes to one day meet the right person, she wanted to take a stand against social pressure to be married by a certain age.

Traveling to places like Morocco, India and Ethiopia, her channel features some vlog-style videos, like when she surprised her mom and aunt [with a trip to the Maldives](#), as well as quick guides, like when [she went shopping in Bangkok, Thailand](#). She also often polls strangers in the street, asking Londoners for their thoughts on the women who wear the hijab or [offering Arab snacks to South Koreans](#).

What do you think when you see my hijab? #LondonOnHijab



While many travel YouTubers are known for quick visits to well-known destinations or lots of beach shots, Beseisso believes she should use her voice for change. She describes herself as a “heart guide” rather than a travel one.

“I make sure to always say I am Palestinian. I have two passports and I live in Dubai,” explains Beseisso. “I have to use that word [Palestinian] because the least I can do is just talk about it and remind people where it is on the map.”

Some of her most poignant videos are incredibly personal, like when she visited Palestine for the first time in her life. She’s also worked with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to showcase the [plight of refugees around the world](#).

My trip to Palestine after 24 years! | رحلتي لفلسطين بعد ٢٤ سنة



“[The Palestine videos] were difficult to make because I didn't want to make it political,” says Beseisso. “I just wanted to show the journey of a girl who visited her country for the first time in 24 years.”

For others interested in building a career on YouTube, Beseisso says it is really important to focus on what you know. Instead of doing popular viral challenges, she focused a niche: traveling to bridge cultures.

"It is much harder to make content with a message that is still entertaining," admits Beseisso. "You think about their finger not clicking away."

Sometimes the pressure to create great content can be difficult. She says, "every week you need a fantastic video."



Haifa

Haifa Beseisso has become a role model for hijabi women around the world thanks to her YouTube channel, *Fly with* [+]

As she looks to the future, Beseisso's next big project is to have ten single mothers from around the world travel to Bali, Indonesia for a retreat. Her mother raised her

alone, and Beseisso says that the project “means a lot to her.” Right now she’s working on securing brands to finance this idea.

## **Becoming a hijabi role model**

Through her videos, Beseisso has become a role model for many hijabi women. She never intended for that, but is heartened by the messages she sees. Laughing, she says that sometimes her comment sections on social media make her “feel like a hijab shop.”

But the 27-year-old wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I’m everything spicy,” says Beseisso, referring to how the West perceives her Arab Muslim Palestinian identity. “When I have all this combined in me and then I have a smile and wear colors, I am saying so much. I like to make use of that.”

*This post was in honor of International Women's Day and is the third in a **series on women succeeding in the travel industry**, whether it be as a solo female traveler or founder of an adventure startup. Know a woman who is killing it in the world of travel? Send an email to [actalty at gmail.com](mailto:actalty@gmail.com) to nominate them for next month's installation of #AdventureHackingWomen.*

*Others in this series include:*

**[The American Blogger Making Six-Figures While Traveling The World](#)**

**[The 33-Year-Old Who Left A Six-Figure Job To Start A Travel Company](#)**

**[How 29-Year-Old CEO Alyssa Ravasio Is Changing American Camping](#)**

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