

Live with Mateo from Zpacks

Joey - Hey everyone and welcome to the Overland Podcast. Thank you for joining us. We're excited to bring you one of our favorite faces that floods our Instagram each day, every day. The face of Zpacks, head of marketing and one that gets us excited to spend money and order things that we tell our wives that we absolutely have to have. And sometimes they believe us and sometimes they don't. But many times, we hit the buy it now button anyways, because it's essential is what I call it. Mateo, thank you for joining us on the podcast.

Mateo - Yeah, no problem. It's a pleasure to be here. You'd be surprised how many emails we get where it's like, hey, can I get this ship somewhere else? And my wife doesn't know that I bought it.

Joey - Yeah. That happens so much. I have multiple shipping addresses for my PayPal account, so I totally understand that. Then I have to figure out how to approach her with, hey, look what I got. It's a little bit of a challenge every now and then to surprise her with, hey, look what I got in the mail.

Anyway, most people know you from that, in fact, but I want to get to know you a little better. I see your face all the time. I get to see your advertisements all the time, but I want to get a little bit of insight that you might have into outdoors backpacking gear through your expertise and experience. So, I have come up with a few questions, personal, some business. You share with me what you can, what you want to, and we'll just get to know each other a little better. How's that?

Mateo - Yeah, sounds good to me.

Joey - Tell us a little bit about you. Where are you from?

Mateo - Based out of Melbourne, Florida. I lived here the majority of my life. I was born in Connecticut, but I moved out when I was three. I also lived in Athens, Georgia for a few years in my early twenties.

Joey - Okay. For someone who has what a lot of us would consider a dream career, as a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Mateo - Oh man, that's funny. I was actually having a conversation earlier today and I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. So that's a difficult thing. I think when I was in my mid to late teens, I had kind of two things that I thought would be really cool is I wanted to either be a sports broadcaster or some sort of sports television career on camera, behind camera, it doesn't matter. And then, the other thing I really wanted to do, which is a very specific thing is I wanted to direct music videos. Like that was like something I really, really wanted to do. I thought combining the visual artistry with the music and combining those two things together to tell stories. I've always thought that was like a, a really cool thing to do.

Joey - Did, did you grow up in the MTV area era like I did and see a lot of music videos?

Mateo - Oh man. Yeah, it was, uh, a weird way it was like super instrumental a lot in a lot of ways for me not only my taste of music but also I think yeah you've got a lot of different types of videos there was definitely cheesy videos but there was like some really artistic avant-garde stuff and I mean like Aerosmith Janie's got a gun like I was a very powerful like it was like realizing that like the song already had a story and if you could connect it with a correlating visual that like you could really like in like three

and a half minutes you can create like a really compelling and moving like story so I always found that super interesting.

Joey - I remember when MTV came out, there was really nothing like it. And we were drawn to it as teenagers back when they actually played music videos. And it was just something that we just had to have on the TV all the time.

Now, other than that, was there a movie, a show or book or anything like that that had a big impact on shaping your life back then?

Mateo - I guess Star Wars.

Joey - Oh, I totally agree.

Mateo - I think the, uh, the internal struggle between good and evil and like rebelling and resisting against, you know, Star Wars is really kind of like rage against the machine, like in movie format, they don't, you know, there's not quite the anger and aggression behind it. But when you think about like, they're fighting like the evil empire, like, there's so many correlations to that. And that's just, always like not accepting the status quo. so much because it is the status quo, just because there's authority doesn't make it right. There was so many parallels and parables, I would say, in Star Wars that really did kind of shape me.

Joey - Yeah, totally true. A lot of hidden meanings there that you had to dig out a lot of times. What about a hero? Did you have a hero when you were young?

Mateo - A hero. It was like, I know it's like super cheesy maybe to say, but it was like a hero might be overplaying it, but definitely like I was looked up to my, to my mom. She was like a single mother and she was really all, she worked two jobs to make sure we had everything we needed. I never went without, I might not have the best or the trendiest or the most popular, but I never went without. And she really, she worked so hard to make sure I had the, the equivalent of two parents' worth of love coming out of one parent and to make sure that, you know, that she really spent the appropriate amount of time and energy into making sure that I was nourished in every way I could. And like, even when I was, you know, you know, ten, eleven, twelve, I could see, I recognized that, you know, I saw what my friends had and what the, you know, nuclear family and the stereotypical family was. And I saw like, how hard she worked. And like, I always appreciated and admired that. So, I don't think probably a person in Miss Worley looked up to more than her.

Joey - Oh man, that's awesome. I love it when people say that parents are, are a precious thing. I think Glen Campbell said it best. They're all to be a hall of fame for mamas. And I totally agree with that. You know, there's one person who has loved me through anything I have ever done. And it's always been my mom.

What's one thing about you or your life that most people don't know?

Mateo - Let's see. What people don't know.

Joey - Any hidden talents or anything you have?

Mateo - Hidden talent. I wouldn't necessarily call it a hidden talent, but I have like an uncanny knack to remember useless knowledge. And even bits of conversations and like weird, minute details. I don't like,

it's like a photographic memory or anything, but I like really, really absorb a lot of like stuff that I'm not even paying attention to. And I can pull it from the depths of my brain. So, it's really, it's really fun to play a trivial pursuit with me on your team. Cause like you're in a good, you got a good shot.

Joey - Yeah. Yeah. know a little bit about everything and a lot about nothing.

Mateo - Yes, for sure.

Joey - You have any guilty pleasures?

Mateo - Oh, Wes Anderson movies. I would say Wes Anderson movies. I don't even care what the story is about. Just the amount of like care he puts into like, the wardrobe, the background, the lighting, the color grading, and like creating a mood. It's just, it's like, I don't even care if like the story, if there is even a story. He's got quirky dialogue. And if characters are like talking to each other and the weird quirky stuff is going on, I just, it gives me like a little giggle, like, you know, inside.

Joey - At any point in your life, did you ever see yourself doing what you're doing now? And the way that it's been happening?

Mateo - No, no. Definitely not. Definitely the amount of time I spend in spreadsheets. I was actually telling the story earlier today to somebody. I was like, a six-year-old me would be very disappointed in knowing how much time I spend in spreadsheets and analyzing data. But I think it's easy to complain about the parts of your job that maybe aren't fun. But I think... My job is so fun. I get to do so many things that are truly rewarding. It's hard work. I spend a lot of time. It's hard to keep up with things. But I don't know. It's just... I definitely would not have seen me doing this.

Joey - How did backpacking enter your life? When did that become something to you?

Mateo - So... it was interesting, I guess. So, when I was growing up, I spent, you know, I grew up really in Florida, so I spent a lot of time exploring, period. On my bike, on my skateboard, on foot, going way farther than I was allowed to go, going into the woods, building forts, and all this stuff. So, I was always exploring. And then when I was like a teenager, I would spend the summers in Connecticut, and then I was actually in you know, small mountains, but I was in the forest and small mountains with my cousins and exploring and having a good time. And, I was, it's like, I always had this urge to explore, to just go, just go somewhere I had never been before. And like when I was in my late teens, early twenties, I was in a band and I got to use that as an excuse to go on tour and see all these new places.

And then whenever that, you know, you settled down a little bit, like, you know, as things happen, I stopped doing that. and then uh when I got married to my current wife we went on a honeymoon and we were in we did this loop from new jersey through New England up there you know Montreal to Toronto Niagara Falls and back you know and uh we're in this little town in Ontario called Perth but we're just taking all that like a resting and we saw this little sign that said the Rideau Trail. We're like, what is this? What is this thing? So, we said, we'll walk forty-five minutes down, turn around forty-five minutes back. And about fifteen minutes in, like I got kind of like just an overwhelming like realization. I was like all of that time where I was like going into the woods and exploring, it's like I've lost it. I haven't done this in so long. And like, it was such a big part of what I was doing when I was a kid.

And I called my friend right there on the trails we're hiking. And I'm like, when I get back, we're going to start hiking. This is like, we're going to do this. And like, it was, I have not stopped from that moment.

Was that two thousand eight? That was in two thousand eight. I've been putting in miles ever since, you know, pre-ZPACs and then ever since ZPACs, just putting in, you know, hundreds of miles a year. like prioritizing time in the back country.

Joey - What's some of the favorite hikes you've done?

Mateo - That's a hard one. I would say, I mean, my favorite, I've done it twice. My favorite hike ever is the Tour de Mont Blanc. It's in Italy, France and Switzerland. You do like a loop around the Mothball Mastiff. It's at, I don't think there's a mile per mile prettier trail.

Joey - Did you camp or did you, did you camp or do the huts?

Mateo - The first time was like fifty-fifty. The second time was all huts. It's there aren't many legal camp spots. So, keep that in mind when you're formulating your itinerary.

Joey - Yeah, I can't tell you how many videos I've watched on that. My wife, that's on our top three places that we want to go in the future on our bucket list. And I can't tell you how many, how many different videos I've watched and they've done it different. You know, people have camped and stayed in the huts, but the huts are seemed like such an experience, such a great experience. And I don't think you'd be missing out on anything if you spent the night in a tent rather than a hut, because the experience is so good.

Mateo - Yeah. It's one of the things it's, it's a negative for some people, but it's like, it is, there's a lot of people on trail. I wouldn't say crowded kind of isn't the right term. There's a lot of people on trail and they're staying in the huts. But part of what makes that experience special is meeting these people from all over the world, you know, eat and breaking bread with them, you know, and just like getting to know them and just telling the stories and share, you know, talking about relationships are nothing but shared experiences. And so, you're like sharing these experiences with so many different people. Some people think that's a turnoff, but I think for that particular hike, it's one of the highlights is like getting to share those memories with like all these like-minded people.

Joey - If money was no object, if time was no object, do you have a place that you would leave and go right now?

Mateo - Just in general?

Joey - Just anywhere in the world. Do you have a bucket list place that you have in mind that you would go first place you'd go?

Mateo - I don't know no one's ever asked me that question. I don't know there's places I keep finding myself going back to which is like I'm trying to make a point of not doing that like there's so much more to it so much more to explore. I don't know I was having a tough time of like a month and a half two months ago and uh you know it happens and my wife's like you know what you know what do you want to do? I said, man, I'd love to go on a long walk. And she's like, where? And I was like, I don't even think it matters. Like, right. If she was, I was like, I prefer a place that didn't have a start and an end because I don't want to be confined by it. She was like, well, how long, how long would you go for? And I was like, until I was done. I feel like that's all I need is a long walk. Like, you know, I don't think it even matters. A lot of times it's the people who are with you that make the walk worth walking.

Joey - You sound like Grandma Gatewood on the Appalachian Trail. Went on a long walk and ended up doing the Appalachian Trail twice.

Mateo - Yeah. I think, yeah, you see people do the AT, and there's nothing wrong with this, and then like you get them in that last couple hundred miles and you see people interview them and talking to them that I'm ready to be done. I want to get to Katahdin and I'm done. And it's like, well, you're, well, you're already done. Like you, you're already done. You've either have gained what you were looking for or realize that you're not going to gain what you're looking, what you're looking for by that point. And so, it's like, you see that it's like, oh, I don't want to be necessarily constrained by that. It'd be nice to do it all. you know but maybe I want to keep walking after I'm done like who knows.

Joey - I've read and listened to a lot of books on people who have done the long trails like that the through hikes and it seems to be I don't know maybe fifty-fifty of the ones who can't wait to get to the end and the ones who are really dreading getting to the end because they don't want to know what they're going to do when they get done...

What's your uh what's your go-to trail snack?

Mateo - oh man that's a that's a thing that definitely changes as time goes on but I think probably the one that's probably stuck around the longest is the sweet chili Doritos sweet chili Doritos I love it yeah I got a little bit of heat a bunch of flavor and it's one of those things where if you push yourself too hard and you're having a hard time eating you'll never have a hard time eating those

Joey - Do you have any other hobbies or interests that you're into?

Mateo - Yeah. I mean, I guess, I would say I would preface hiking is one side of the same coin to me for exploring an adventure, right? I can put Tons of miles into a foreign city that I've never been to and be just as happy as I am on trail. So, for me, it's the same thing. where hiking is you don't know what's around the next corner. And it's like, in Paris, you don't know what's around the next corner. In Istanbul, you don't know what's around the next corner. So, I think just traveling in general, like wandering, I like to really wander when I travel. So that's my main hobby. But after that, it's like, I definitely like photography and videography.

And something I've been doing, even, you know, it's like sometimes you do things you don't even realize, like, what you're doing or that it's a part of you is uh like woodworking like and especially now that I'm getting old. I'm like trying to lean into this man I want to be a woodworker right but it's like but I you know I was like eight years old with like a jigsaw building skateboard ramps. I think about that now it's like there's I don't see any eight-year-olds out here with jigsaws building anything.

But it was like, I was always like building forts. I mean, I built like a fort when I was fifteen in Connecticut. That thing was still there like, you know, ten years ago. And it's just like, it's just I love like building stuff. And so that's probably another hobby of mine I like. But really adventure, photo, videography and like woodworking. Those are things I'm really into.

Joey - What inspired you to pursue the path that you're on in life right now? How did that come about?

Mateo - I don't know if I pursued the path or if the path pursued me in a way. I know I don't want to get philosophical with you. One of the things, I'm a firm believer. I don't like the term luck, like whatever, you got a good fortune or whatever you want to call it. I don't like that because so many people who are

lucky or, oh, you're so fortunate to have that, they've made a series of decisions that put them in a room to allow them to walk through the door when it opened. Very infrequently is there just like true happenstance. And so, I think, you know, I was going through my journey with hiking, and I was, like, doing my research, and I found out that Joe, the owner of D-Packs, had moved from New York to the town just south of me. And I was like, whoa. I was like, that's crazy. And so, I sent him an email, and I was like, hey, man. I was like, can I take you to lunch? I just want to ask you some questions. I just want to talk hiking.

And so, we went out to lunch, and when we were done, he was like, hey, you want a job? And I was like, doing what? He was like, sewing. I was like, I don't know how to sew. He was like, I'll teach you. And I was, I was in the right moment where I was like, this is right after the housing collapse. So, my previous job was I was making like architectural shapes and design and designs for construction. And like the company went out of business and I was in the right moment. And I was like, why not? Like, I'll get to make my own gear. Like, you know, like, I was like, I'll get to learn a new skill. Like this is something I like in a category I like. And so, I took the chance and then I happened to have, you know, I used to be in a band. I was like the vice president of a soccer supporters' group. I had all these things where I was bringing people together. And so, it was like, I helped recruit, you know, our core staff. Cause at the time it was just the owner, his wife and myself. I was the first like employee that, you know, didn't have the same last name. Right. And so, recruiting friends and family members and, and it just kept going and going. And eventually like my strong suit was that bringing people together, communicating, you know, media. And so that's, I ended up as the director of marketing.

I don't have a piece of paper that says that's what I should do, but I've got a lot of experience in it at this point. I kept just walking through the doors and making sure I was putting myself in the position to be there if a door opened. Here I am. Like you said, I do have a dream job for a lot of people. Most dream jobs, you don't see the parts that suck or the stress or the response. If I do my job poorly, like really, really poorly. People lose their job. You want to talk about a weight on your shoulder? It's like, you know, when you think about that and it's like, yeah, I get to be an asshole in front of the camera and be silly and like annoying. But it's like, you know, it has to work like it has to have engagements and conversions and all these things. So, it's fun, but a lot of responsibility, you know, a lot of burden to it.

Joey - I totally get that. A lot of people don't. They just see the glamour. They don't see all the all the weight that you bear. But, you know, like we said earlier, you do have a job that a lot of people envy for a company that a lot of people love. And, you know, when I was growing up and I thought about this earlier today. And I'll get around to my question here in just a second. But I thought about this earlier today. When I was a young boy trying to figure out what I wanted to do in life, I was always afraid to work at a place that I loved. Like for say, for instance, I never wanted to work at Pizza Hut because I love pizza. And I was afraid that I would end up hating pizza. And I would talk to my friends and say, oh man, you're so lucky you work here. You get to have all the pizza you want. And they're like, I'm around this stuff all day. I can't stand the stuff. And I was always afraid to work at a place that I loved.

So, is it hard to work at a place or for a place that's also one of your favorite hobbies and loves?

Mateo - I would say no. But to your point, I also understand where you're coming from. I think, especially in the earlier years when I was... actively part of customer service, I had the opposite problem of what you're saying. I had hike envy. We would get all these customers being like, I'm going on this hike, and I'm going on this hike, and I need to get this for this. And I would just, I still have it. I still add to

it. A list of all these trails I hadn't heard of, and I'd go read them, and I'd put them in order. Like, I want to do these and try to prioritize them. So, I had the opposite problem where I was like, I'm stuck in this office. You're out there having fun. And so, I wanted to do that. But I think, it's one of those things where it's like, you know, I've put in a lot of hours and like, you know, I work hard and put a lot of focus into it and I need that disconnection of being in the outdoors. So, it's an interest, an interesting thing.

I said, all the things in my entire life that I've gotten into, I like, well, I'm one of those people who get super into something, you know, buy all, buy all the expensive stuff and, and like do all the research and both. And then like, I'll do it for a little while. And then like, I stopped like one day, I was just like one day for whatever, whatever reason I didn't do the plan that I had. And then I never pick it up again. And like hiking, hiking is the one consistent in my life. That's never happened. There's never, there's never been a day when I'm not daydreaming about the next trip. And, so I would say that that probably means something. I hope, I hope it does. I hope it continues.

Joey - Of course. You know, and I also thought as a follow-up question that, and you kind of answered it, even though you work for a company that you love and doing something that you love, there are still times where you have to get away and release and just get away because you're like, okay, I'm working, I'm doing this so all these people can use these items and get away. And here I am not able to do exactly what I'm helping them do. And it's, it's just a thought.

Sometimes it goes through my mind. I love my job, but there again, I also love my time off. And so, yeah,

Mateo - I think there, there's this weird thing, right. Cause so, so many people who've started, you know, are smaller. I don't even don't call them competition. Cause I don't really like to look at it. Some of the smaller, newer brands in our community is like, like they're through hikers they started a through hike they're like just like our owner I want I made this and I people like it I want to keep making it and so they get that experience and so like I didn't get that I didn't get one of the three big through hikes and so it's not quite imposter syndrome because I still try to do four hundred miles a year.

But it's like I only I've got a wife and a daughter and a full-time real job it's like I can only get away do one week at a time, two weeks at a time. And every once in a while, if I'm feeling reckless, I'll do three weeks. But it's so hard to be gone. I've got a whole team underneath me and just making sure everything's coordinated. So, it's tough. And so, it's just like, I'm so envious of all these through hikers and some of the people in the other companies in our space who've had that opportunity because I haven't. And like, I probably won't until my daughter graduates high school. Like, you know, it's going to be one of those things. I'm going to be an old timer first time, like through hiker, one of the big three.

Joey - Yeah. Same here. Well, there are a lot of really great companies out there. You mentioned them. A lot of people do the through hikes. They start the companies. Garage Grown Gear has really put out and really made popular a lot of these little mom and pop places like that. And I never want to seem like I'm ever putting their products down because I use most of them and have a lot of them.

But what, in your opinion... sets Z-Packs apart and what makes them special as a brand in the Ultralight community?

Mateo - I think so many of the companies come from the ones I respect at least, right? They come from a similar place, right? They come from a place where they are scratching their own itch. They're walking the walk and they have a... you know, a perspective and they understand what the customer needs. I

think one of the things that really kind of has set us apart is, you know, like most companies that starts, you know, at the owner, the founder level. Right. And Joe is like, he's a, he's, he's got a super interesting mind. And when it comes to like patterns, when it comes to material efficiencies and just Rick thinking outside the box and a lot of things, it's like, you know, now we've got a team, so it's like kinds of gives us a competitive advantage over some smaller companies.

But I think the real thing there is just like, we, our owner's mind and our, our approach to design, it's just a little bit different. It's on the borderline reckless, when it comes to like pushing the limits of fabric, capabilities, feature sets re like, right. We're like, what's the bare minimum we can give somebody so they can still, the product still functions, still does what it needs, still makes it a full through hike, but it comes in at the lightest possible weight. I think we are still just always finding ways. Now it's diminished returns a little bit, like the amount of effort that goes in at this point to refining the weights is a little bit tougher. But I think it's just our approach more than anything.

Joey - Do you really look into customer feedback when you're doing things like that about the people that are out there using it and giving you feedback on stuff?

Mateo - yeah, a hundred percent. And then there's like an unwritten, but I've spoken it many times, an unwritten rule where like if a customer complains, three different customers complain about the exact same thing, it's like, okay, now we're doing a thorough product review. Like, okay. Is this really a problem or were these outliers? Okay. It is a problem. How are we going to fix it? How are we going to change it? And a thing that's really hampers the marketing efforts actually here is, we make silent changes. We'll fix it. Like, because, you know, almost everything is just made in the United States in our shop. So, it's like, okay, we've got fifty of these on the shelf, we're going to sell through.

And then right after that, this change that's going to prevent this failure is going to be implemented. But it's like it's not like, oh, now it's the 2026 version. It's just like, no, we just we make an we make a silent change as needed so that the customers get the best experience immediately. And so instead of saving up eight small changes and then marketing as though it's a 2026 version. There were six versions in 2025. We just didn't know it because we made some things you'd never know or never see. But it's like but we're always like taking feedback and making changes.

Joey - You are on your when on your marketing, on the on the videos that you make for Zpax, you're very animated guy. Y'all probably do your own style of. of anything that compared to the other companies that I've seen, it's very eye-catching. It draws your attention. And it just struck me the other day when I was thinking about visiting with you, how hard is it to get people to trust? The business out there, it's very competitive. There's a lot of people making really good products. How do you get people to trust you saying what you're saying is true?

Mateo - Oh, I don't think that's actually that hard necessarily. I don't think I'm making that, bold of claims. I would say, you know, nothing's too audacious. So, I think in the customer feedback and the company history helps there. But yeah, I mean, the products are so proven. It's like the D like the Trek. He just voted the duplex, the best overall ultralight tank. Again it's the twelfth or thirteenth year something like that right it's our duplex classic tent is like a classic like you know at this point so I think we've just got social proof for so long I guess I have the luxury at this point I had to sit through all those years to get the luxury but it's there I think um to your point like the eye-catching stuff and it's like a little backstory on that approach really is like, you know, we tried everything, right?

That's what you do in marketing. You try it and you just about everything. And it's like, how many, how many videos or pictures do you need to see of like a good-looking person standing on the edge of a Valley looking out real serious across the mountains. And it's like, you take the logo away and place it with another company's logo and you wouldn't even know the difference. There's nothing that speaks to anybody about that company in any way. And so, yeah, we ran those ads and we saw what the click rates and engagement rates and conversion rates are. And they're terrible. It's like, especially with made in the USA with lower margins, like it's hard to even make your money back on that stuff.

And so, we gave it a shot. I kind of made a tongue in cheek video where I was like, you know what? Like, I'm going to be like an annoying used car salesman here. And I'm going to, and I'm going to make, I'm going to make fun. I'm going to make fun of marketing. The customers, especially in the ultralight backpacking world are really smart. They're super savvy. They do their research. Like, you know, they're really, really smart. So, like to try to like pull one over on them with some FOMO we add, or, you know, it's like, it's silly.

So, let's just like, call it what it is. Let's have some fun. Yeah, I'm going to be annoying a little bit. I annoy myself. I pull him up and I'm like, oh my God, this guy. I read one of the comments on our latest ad and it literally was one word. It said, asshole. That was the whole comment. I almost responded with my personal account. I was like, yeah, every time I see that guy, I feel that way too. But so, we're, so we're just having, yeah, we're just having fun. And I'm, and like, I'm just telling you like, like whatever, like really, what is it? It's a press release. Hey guys, we came out, we came out with this. This is what makes it special really quick, but one, two, three, and then like, it weighs this much, check it out. Like, right. And it's like, that's what it is. It's like, yeah, the beginning millisecond is a little bit in it, but it's stops you. And then you, when you look at the view rate, uh, duration of our ads, people want, if we, if we did that, scroll stop to you, you watch it and like, you know, and that's the point, right? It's like, yeah, I'm I don't know if I, if I had the disposition to pull that off three years ago or the lack of shame, you know, it's a mix. It's a mix of being shameless and also comfortable with myself at the same time. But yeah, it's like, yeah. And so, it works. So, we do it.

And we also have some of the lifestyle, pretty stuff, some user generated content. We switch it up, but I think it's wild to go to a trade show and people are like, you made me laugh so hard and like that's a kind of a thing that like I wasn't really thinking about when we did that it's like you could hate Zpacks you could think our gear is trash but if like if I made you giggle we still brought value into your like you know like we're giving you value within the community if we can make you crack a smile or a smirk you know um and hope and hopefully you can appreciate that we're willing to make fun of ourselves and not take ourselves too seriously.

Joey - It's one of the things that draws me to look at every single thing that you do because everybody's looking to laugh. If you look at the most popular videos on social media, it's the funny ones. People are drawn to that. People love something that will pick them up and make them laugh. I love that.

Would you consider social media being one of the things that has really made you successful as a business because using that as such a tool for advertisement?

Mateo - No, no. I would say, I would say, you know, we didn't even, for the first ten plus years of our existence, we didn't spend a dollar on marketing. It was all word of mouth. And I think, and I, and I think even now, somebody getting into backpacking if they're best backpack best lightweight best ultralight

backpack whatever you're going to get if you type that in or best tent all this stuff on google you're going to get a bunch of review sites and blog sites talking about the best and it's like we're on all those lists like right somewhere we're not somewhere number one somewhere number three they get right some we're not on at all. Those are bad lists... no but it's like so you're going to find out who we are just from people talking about us like organically because we've had so much social proof. I think the social media and its current, especially the advertising in its current form is like keeping people who are already in the community just informed, right?

And we, our pace of innovation, the amount of new stuff we come out with is a lot. It's almost, we're on our third year of like, two or more products a month coming out. That's insane. That's absolutely insane. It's, and that's why you're talking about the stress and you need to get away and stuff like that. It's like, it's like even creating collateral and content for two products a month, let alone, you know, designing the stuff and coming up with the stuff, running the customer service team and putting, create social media ads, scheduling and all that stuff. It's, there's a lot going on. And, so it's just keeping people informed.

Joey - The post that came out from one of the, I think it was the AT associations said that there was like so many less applications made for the AT this year compared to last year. But from what you're saying, the demand for product is even greater. Are you seeing a trend, whether it's increasing or decreasing from where you're at?

Mateo - I think that from where we stand, and this is like looking at all the data points that we have and that we can be given, is that the amount of people in the outdoors hasn't decreased, but a lot of them aren't doing the disciplines as much. And so, I think last year it looked like there was about a ten percent drop off year over year through hikers in the AT. I'm not, I think Hurricane Helene may have skewed the registration numbers. I think some people are, I think some people are either slow playing it when they're going to start. Some people aren't registering at all because you don't need to register at all. And, some people may not have figured out, you know, oh, am I going to do a flip-flop? Am I going to go southbound instead of northbound and give them more time to fix the trail?

There are so many factors at play. So, I'm not necessarily sure. We did go to the AT Gateways event two weekends ago. And I would say that attendance was down. So, we'll see. I would say our sales, though, like we had more, orders year over year, in February than the previous February. So, so we're not, we're not seeing things go backwards, I would say, but yeah, we gotta be paying attention for sure.

Joey- Purchasing ultralight gear is so hard for me. I'm the kind of guy who wants to touch things and feel things. And like you said, ultralight guys do their research. They look at how much everything weighs, how big it is when it's open, when it's packed. But I want to feel things. I want to see the weight of things and how big it is in my hand. So, I know how big it is in my pack. And so, without that hands-on experience, for there being like a store for me to go to, to see everything and touch everything.

Why do you think there aren't any more outdoor stores that are carrying ultralight gear and just regular backpacking gear?

Mateo - Oh man, how much time do you got? I would say, first off, price point. There are very few people who need a seven-hundred-dollar tent. I mean, you could argue that nobody needs a seven-hundred-dollar tent. Right. So, price point. So, you're carrying that is going to appeal to much a much

smaller customer base. Right. Then you got the next step is like, OK, if I can get a Coleman tent wholesale for thirty bucks and I spend a thousand dollars on tents, I get a lot. I spend a thousand dollars on Z-Packs tents. I get one and a half. You know what I'm saying?

So, the amount of money tied up in inventory to carry, that's just us, we talk about Hyperlite or whoever, right? The amount of money it takes to have inventory, it's much higher. And then the next thing with that is a lot of the outdoor companies, even if they're not made in the USA, the fabrics are expensive and it costs a lot. So, you're not getting wholesale margins like you would with like a Chinese made like nylon tent, like, right. You know, those are probably landing in the U. S. for less than a hundred bucks. And then like, you know, they can sell them for three hundred bucks and they make two hundred, you know, make two hundred, two hundred fifty bucks on something.

So, they're going to put the stuff on the shelf that's going to make them a higher margin. And a lot of Ultralight stuff just doesn't have those margins. So, I think all of that together makes it really, really prohibitive like if I was a retailer, you would have you would have a hard time convincing me to like invest what little capital I had into like a surplus of ultralight gear and brands knowing that like it's going to be a hard sell for most people.

Joey - Totally get that and I think that also contributes to what you said about word of mouth you know when people go hiking with each other and they get to camp and set up camp the very first thing they do is check out each other's gear and that's when I was able to see firsthand a few of the things that I was able to purchase and upgrade as I went along. And I think that actually contributes to a lot of sales that you have when people get out there and hike together and see each other's gear, able to see it and things like that. So totally get that word-of-mouth thing.

Mateo - Yeah, I would say an interesting thing, it's mainly with shelters, is like, when you come out with a shelter, before we really see a surge, it needs a season, a whole backpacking season of being out on trail for it to be exposed to new hikers, right? They're like, oh, I saw that online, but I didn't know. Oh, look, that's cool. I like this and how this is. And then, you know, by the end, then you get people like, I use this then on my thru-hike and I loved it because of this, this, and this. And then now the net, the next season of thru-hikers are watching and doing their research. And now they have, quite a bit more information to pull from to help make their decisions.

Joey - Have you noticed any misconceptions about ultralight gear that you have to address?

Mateo - I think a lot of people, you'll see this, I think you get shaming both ways. You get ultralight elitists who shame people for having heavy base weights. And then I think that's kind of met in kind with people who try to say that being ultralight is reckless to a degree. And I think you can have an entire ultralight kit with a base weight, we're not even getting extreme here, like, ten pounds or twelve pounds, where, like, you have luxury built in. You're not missing anything. You've got your first aid kit. You've got enough water. You've got enough clothing. You've got it. Like everything is going to do the job for you with some luxury.

And I think there's just this weird like stuck in tradition kind of mindset with a lot of like people who pack heavy, which there's nothing wrong with packing heavy, but it's like, you need this, this, this, and this, and this, and this. And like, I've got with exception of a few like safety, safety things. And it's like, I've got kind of like a rough three hike rule. It's like, you carry this for three hikes and like hundreds of

miles and you never used it unless it's like a super like specific safety item. Like you probably don't need it. Like you don't like, why are you, why are you carrying this? You know?

And then another like silly, like a little thing I say is like the most important thing you can put in your pack is experience. And so like, with it with experience you really do learn what you need and what you don't need and where you can feel comfortable pushing the boundaries in one way or another like that so I just think I think there's a misconception in certain parts of the backpacking community that going ultralight is reckless for sure some people do take it to the point of recklessness.

But I'd say you could also flip that around and say if you're carrying a hundred-pound pack like that's also reckless because you're putting your ankles and your back and your knees and maybe other hikers who are going to have to look out for you because are you going to make it? If that's what hiking was for me, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't be a hiker at all. If that was the only way to do it, I wouldn't do it. It would be unenjoyable for me.

Joey - True. And I also think that a lot of people think that to go ultralight is you have to suffer. And like you said, if you've got the right gear, you've got some luxury items in there. And so, I go pretty light, but I don't suffer. I take everything I want. And if I'm willing to carry it, I'll use it. But if I don't use it, it's coming out.

What upcoming trends do you see shaping the future of ultralight backpacking gear? Do you see any trends?

Mateo - Yeah, I think the trend that you're starting to see now is, if we go back to when I started at Z-Packs, is a lot of people were like, you know, make your own gear type of people, right? And what we were coming out with, it was... people using it kind of in a reckless manner. Like they're people who were true, full-on masochists. They were looking to push the limits, survive, not be comfortable. And, so what's happened, you know, this is my fifteenth year at Zpacks, is like that crowd slowly gave way to the Amazon consumer, right? It does, you know, type, that's the type of person, the type of mentality, right? So, these people aren't masochists. They just, they don't want to suffer by carrying heavy weight. So, but they also like don't necessarily have an appreciation for what comes along with ultralight or they don't, you know, they don't want to like sacrifice.

So, I think what you're seeing now in the past year, year and a half, I think is the expanded experience where it's like, people are like, I want the lightest weight, whatever that has this, this, this, and this like, right. They're not, they're not willing to sacrifice anything on their list. So, they're willing to carry a little bit of extra weight as long as it has this, this, this, and this.

And so, I think you're, you're seeing, you know, from Zpacks and some other companies, like a couple more bells and whistles, like, you know, all right, you want magnetic door closures on your tan or like a peak van or zippered storm doors or things like that. There's like, we can add some extra weight and turn a little bit of extra money, but it's, but it'll still be light. And you have all the bells and whistles that are on your, on your list. So, it's like achieving the lowest possible weight while not losing any functionality that like someone looking for an expanded experience wants.

Joey - Like having a pair of camp slippers.

Mateo - Yeah, that's funny you say that. That's one of the things. One of our projects now is we have a list, and that list is things that we don't carry that a lot of people do carry. And then the project goes, why don't we carry it? And what would it take for us to carry it? And the camp slippers were one of the byproducts of this long-term project. Was it's like, how can we make camp slippers light enough that we would actually carry them and actually like function? And, uh, I think we did.

Joey - You did, you sold me on them.

Mateo - We've never had, we've never had an item sell like that. It's insane. Like we haven't, we haven't had a run of those yet. It lasted more than four days. Like they've sold out three consecutive times in less than four days. It's unreal.

Joey - Well, they are the lightest, most comfortable camp shoes I've ever seen. I worked so hard to try to make some because I could not find any that were light enough that I was willing to carry. And then those came out and I'm like, thirty bucks. I mean, at least I got to try them at least. They're cheap enough where you can just try them. And I bought them and they go everywhere with me.

Mateo - Absolutely level. Happy to hear you like them.

Joey - Oh, love them. In fact, and now I got to have some in every color because they, you know, cause I'm that way. We have to match.

Mateo - You're going to have to wait like another month and a half for the next one.

Joey - That's fine. That's fine. Well, saying that, what is your favorite piece of gear that's made by Z-Packs and why?

Mateo - Favorite? Oh man. I gotta, I gotta give you two. I can't give you one. I think, the two things that really enhanced my backpacking that we've come out with, and this is in the last year and a half total basically, is we came out with a Super Nero with the vest strap option. I love that fifty-liter pack. I basically can use it for ninety-nine percent of every hikes I would do. And the vest straps just make it feel so tight across your body. And just, like, no bouncing around. It's just so comfortable.

And then the second thing is our summer quilt, our forty-degree summer quilt. It weighs, like, nothing, and it packs down so small. And a lot of times, especially if you're doing summer or early fall, like, you don't need more than that. So, like, the weight of my big three is, like, less than three pounds, like, every time I go out now. And it's just, like, you want to talk about it packs down small so it's just like my pack is small my pack is light and it's just making the experience of hiking so much easier and more comfortable uh just big game changers those are probably like my two favorite things I can't give you one they're kind of working together.

Joey - I totally get it. If you could go on a dream backpacking trip with any historical figure, who would it be if you could pick one person, who would it be?

Mateo - Dream backpacking. How about William Bartram, the famous botanist, because he did a badass journey. So, if you haven't done the Bartram Trail in Georgia and North Carolina, you should. It's awesome. But how cool would it be to go on that trip with that guy and have him just be like, oh, check out this thing and it's this and like the amount of stuff you would learn on that trip, you know, just from having like an expert like that and just somebody who was. Could you imagine like in the seventeen

hundreds being so passionate about botany that you would like go through the mountains without a trail to still like check out like what was there so you could draw pictures of it and describe it? Like that guy is a badass adventure. So, I think like how cool would that be?

Joey - That'd be cool. Do you, work out at all? Do you try to stay in shape or are you ready at all times? How do you do it?

Mateo - Well, God, the real answer is so sad. It's like, I try to walk locally frequently, but I don't do it as much as I could. Um, so the secret is going on enough trips a year that like, my, my trail legs don't ever fully disappear. I think it would be. So, it's like, I get to go on a bunch of smaller trips. Like, right. So, it's like, I just, I just did something in March. I got something in April. I got nothing in May. I got something in June. Yeah. Another thing in August, another thing, September and October. It's just truck. That's my, my, my key now is trying not to get fat, which is a hard part in that, uh, walking locally if I can, and then just going on enough trips, you know, throughout the year to where my trail legs don't disappear.

Joey - I'm going to pay you a compliment. Now you sound like Patrick French. When your answer, because I asked him the same question and he said, I've done this for so long. I just never lose my trail legs.

Mateo - Yeah. Yeah. And that's true to a certain point.

Joey - You can always just pick up right where you left off. As long as you don't do anything stupid and lay around and get fat.

Mateo - Yeah. Yeah. There's, I remember I heard a long, a long, long time ago. It's like talking about through hiking. It's like three days, three weeks, three months. And it's like after three days, like you're doing pretty good after three weeks you're doing great and then after three months you're an animal, right? And so, it's like and so it's like so when I go on trail it's like usually that the morning of the fourth day, I'm just like however much I was struggling in these first couple days like I wake up and like almost like my legs start walking without me like I don't think about like my legs are like trying to pull me forward. They're trying to. It's like they've taken a life of their own a little bit. And it's like, this is wild phenomenon where you're just like, okay, your brain's just like disconnects from the pain. And it understands like, you have reprogrammed me. My new programming is I walk eight hours a day in the mountains. And like, it just starts to do it. You know, it's such a wild phenomenon.

Joey - It really is. Tell me about the Highlander that's going on in June that I'm seeing a lot about.

Mateo - Well, you should go to it. That's what you should do. It's always so hard to explain. But basically, what this company Highlander has done is creating a hiking series. It's not a race, it's not a challenge or anything like that. And, where they bring together all these people. And they take away everything that terrifies you about hiking.

So, it's really great for novice backpackers. It's like, are you afraid of running out of water? They've got water stations on trail. Are you afraid of getting lost? Everything's marked everywhere. They have a guy called the sweeper who stays with the last person always. So, everyone's always accounted for. Search and rescue is on call. You don't like to poop in the woods. They've got porta-potties at all the checkpoints. You don't want to carry a ton of food. They give you food at all the checkpoints. And so

basically, they take away all the things that terrify you from hiking. They take it all away. They just let you enjoy the act of being in nature and hiking.

And I think the best part of Highlander isn't Highlander at all. It's not what they do. It's the fact that you see all these people doing the hardest day they've ever done in their life. Overcoming their ankle hurting, overcoming blisters, overcoming being tremendously out of shape. And you see all these people rally around each other, these strangers, motivating one another, pushing one another, cheering them on when they get to the checkpoints at the end of the day. And I don't know if there's ever been a place I've seen so many tears of people like fighting through adversity and then overcoming it and the overcoming it is where the tears come out like I didn't think I could do this.

Then there was a time at the last of the last year was that we were all at the end and we were forming like a human tunnel you know putting our hands up and this lady turned the corner and she was coming down you could tell like she was she was struggling as soon as she saw us like she lit up and she just pushed through and she went through. I started weeping like a baby. I was just like watching, watching this stranger over, you know, overcome and have this moment. And it was like, you'll never be, if you like to be in the outdoors and hike, I don't think you could ever be around that many like-minded people. And there's just something like, you know, relationships are built by shared experience. I don't think there's anything quite like that in hiking that I've ever seen.

And it's like on paper, why would I want to go hike with three hundred people? And it's like it's like, you know, people don't all leave at the same time. It's like not that different than doing a normal hike in that way. That's being together at the end and like the events and the fun time, just meeting all these people. I don't know. It's just it's. a transformative experience and uh that comes from something I don't even really like to hike with more than three or four of my friends like right yeah but something about that is like I don't know it's special I definitely think everybody should do it at least once.

Joey - It sounds like a very, very interesting and credible event. And I'm drawn to it. I really am.

You meet people all the time, whether at events or on the trail. Is there anything that you wish people would ask you? Is there anything I wish people would ask me? Whether about yourself or about the game?

Mateo - Yeah, no. I think I would rather, I would rather somebody share with me a person, something that they're personally struggling with. And I don't even care if it's about backpacking. And like, ask me if I had any advice to help them with that, right? So, it's like backpacking is obviously, I'm not a therapist, but backpacking is like my strong suit. But it's like, I'm really having trouble with this, whether it's like gear, philosophically, the food that they're eating, the shoes that they're wearing, like come to, like use me as a resource to make your life better, your experience better. Cause I think like, that's what I want to be.

You know, that's how, that's what I want to leave the earth with is like making, making people's lives better. Like I don't need a legacy, but I like, that's, that's what makes me happy is like making a difference. Like small talks, fun, joking around about the commercials is fun. Like whatever, I can do that all day and talk gear, but like share with me, a place where you could use some help and let, and let's, you know, be vulnerable a little bit and let's help you.

Joey - That's incredible. Well, thank you so much for coming on and visiting with us and letting us see a little bit of the man behind the beard and getting to know you a little bit better. And we wish you all the best in 2025. I know you've got a very busy schedule. And but anyway, it's been a thrill to talk to you and I greatly appreciate you taking the time to come on here with us.

Mateo - I appreciate you having me. I appreciate you asking questions that people don't ask me all the time. That's always fun.

Joey - Thanks, man. I hope somebody got something out of it.

Joey - I did. I guarantee you people will. I want to thank everybody who is listening and who will listen.

Thank you to all our sponsors who make sure that the show happens each week. Everyone who supports us by listening and participating. I hope you have a wonderful week.

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We're out.