

## CEP Magazine – October 2023



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### Meet Farzana Mohomed: Compliance practitioner beyond borders

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By Farzana Mohomed and Adam Turteltaub

**AT:** You have had one of the most international and diverse careers I have ever come across in compliance. Your career has spanned Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, and you have visited more than 100 countries and all seven continents. First, what led you to embrace such a globe-spanning life?

**FM:** My mother once told me that when I was a few weeks old, I would stare at a suitcase that was stored above the cupboard. Even as a baby, she knew I was fascinated by the idea of travel. She was right. I was always eager to explore unfamiliar places and meet new people. It is a deep-seated need to see the world beyond my own backyard and experience all it has to offer.

I believe I inherited my pioneering spirit from my grandparents. They left their home country of India to start a new life in South Africa more than a hundred years ago. They had very few possessions and funds, and knew truly little about what awaited them. But they were brave and adventurous, and they instilled those same qualities in me. My parents were also supportive of my independent spirit and allowed me to forge my own path in life. They did not pressure me to follow the traditional gender roles that were expected of women in my generation.

I am deeply grateful to have had a compliance career that created opportunities for me to indulge in my never-ending wanderlust and curiosity. I look forward to many more years of exploring the rest of the world and making my mark in the compliance field.

**AT:** Any personal favorite destinations that are little known?

**FM:** I prefer unique and out-of-the-way experiences like visiting Nuclear Reactor 4 in Chernobyl or the pyramids in Sudan, taking the Trans-Siberian train, flying over the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland while it was erupting, or sailing with playful whales and penguins in Antarctica, to name a few. Saudi Arabia is proving to tick all my boxes when it comes to unique experiences. It has a rich culture and history—and breathtaking natural beauty. It is still little-known as a tourist destination, as it only opened its doors to the world for the first time in September 2019, so when I explore this beautiful country, I feel like the pioneer my grandparents were. The highlights so far have been visiting Mecca and peaceful city of Medina, the Nabatean tombs in Al-‘Ula and Al-Bada, the Gingerbread Village in Abha, Jeddah’s Old City; snorkeling in the Red Sea; camping, stargazing and dune bashing in the desert; and experiencing the warm and kind hospitality of colleagues and strangers. I have attended an Alicia Keys concert, Saudi Cup Horse Racing, a Formula 1 race, and soccer matches—something unheard of for women to attend a few years ago.

**AT: Any compliance–related anecdotes you can share from your travels?**

**FM:** I have many, but the ones that stand out to me are the two occasions I was asked by immigration personnel for “facilitation” payments in Madagascar and Nigeria. The irony was that I was giving anti–corruption training to my colleagues on those trips.

I have traveled extensively and have rarely seen unethical behavior, except for taxi drivers! In fact, my travels have restored my faith in humanity. I am not very conscientious and have “lost” wallets and phones on my travels to Thailand, India, South Africa, Nigeria, Denmark, Argentina, and many other countries. However, in each case, these items have been returned to me. This suggests that people are generally honest and trustworthy—even when they are not being watched, which I believe is the definition of integrity.

**AT: You moved to Saudi Arabia in 2021 for work. Saudi Arabia is an interesting choice. Why the move from Europe to Saudi Arabia?**

**FM:** When I moved to my current role, I was reminded of John F. Kennedy’s famous words: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” Being part of a compliance team to help design a compliance program for a project of this scale is daunting, but it is also an opportunity to make a real difference.

I am passionate about environmental, social, and governance (ESG) compliance, and I was excited to have the opportunity to further develop my expertise in this area in the Middle East— a region that is rapidly evolving and presents many challenges and opportunities for ESG compliance.

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