



HD A lifetime of travel lands Simon Westcott in prime position with LUXE City Guides

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At 49, Simon Westcott is a veteran of the travel publishing industry. Westcott, who divides his time between Melbourne and **Hong Kong**, is the co-founder and chairman of boutique travel **company** Mr & Mrs Smith and spent seven years as global publisher of the Lonely Planet publishing empire. He's recently acquired [LUXE City Guides](#), which he says turns over "between \$1 million and \$10 million" each year.

I've been in this sweet spot of media and publishing and travel for the past 13 years, and I've been a long-term fan of LUXE.

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As a very experienced traveller, it amazes me the things that LUXE can still teach me. What I love about the brand from a user perspective is the quality of the recommendations that LUXE gives. The curation and the flavour are pretty unique. Laser sharp recommendations, delivered in this snappy, funny, intelligent way. Almost laugh-out-loud at times.

I **purchased** LUXE with my own funds, together with [chairman] Julian Knights. We are the majority shareholders, although we also have a close-knit family of smaller private investors who are known to us.

I've been around the **sale** table three times now, including as part of the core management team that **sold** Lonely Planet to the BBC. I think it is amazing how much it still comes back to the personal rapport between buyer and seller. And most buyers like to **buy** from someone they know. I think there is also that "get on the plane moment" when you have to make people know you want [the business].

I absolutely use a business plan.

I think there has to be a simple, agile approach to business plans. In the LUXE context, we want to jump into the business and see how it goes. The plan is evolving organically.

We want to focus on three key areas, the first of which is to really fill out the premium digital content offering. The curation of LUXE guides is second-to-none in print, which is updated around every 18 months. We want to pull this to a monthly cycle in digital, and pull the print cycle to around one year and later perhaps to 'just-in-time'. This constantly updated database will allow us to explore other models like subscriptions and business-to-business for say, travel agents.

We really want to bring the guides alive. Like a concierge service, we're hand-picking recommendations. But a good concierge also makes the booking for you. We want to work with partners like **hotel** suppliers and preferred travel agents, developing a close-knit family of like-minded suppliers.

The third aspect is **China**. We want to take those models to **China** in the next six-to-12 months. The travel market is really maturing there. There is such a sophisticated, emerging upper-class there – a well-travelled cohort in their 30s who have been travelling now for 10 years. The market is still niche but that suits us in many ways. In many ways we are a hand-**sold**, viral product.

I think it is less about making the business more profitable and more about the scalability of the business. And it's about services. People are spending \$12.99 on a travel guide and then thousands

of dollars on their trips. If we can look at the services around those trips, then the average **transaction** for those customers can increase.

I sleep very well at night and I find I can shut out anxiety. There is nothing you can do at 2am in the morning, 99 times out of 100. It might also help that I meditate every morning. Every business owner worries about cash and the burden of cash.

I love the win:win of a good strategic partnership. At Mr & Mrs Smith, we partnered with VISA to give Silver Smith membership cards to new VISA signature card holders. It was a genuinely premium benefit for their new customers and it was a great, **commercial** marketing opportunity for us.

I am interested in opportunities for LUXE to take a position in some kind of foundation or corporate social responsibility activity. We're exploring what that would look like at the moment. The ideas of cultural exchange and environmental sustainability – those issues are important for our travellers. I believe LUXE can find its place in those kinds of dialogues and actively help in developing destinations.

No boutique business can afford to ignore social media. At LUXE, the opportunities to share content via social media will grow when we launch our digital platform.

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RE austr : Australia | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania

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