



HOW TO PREPARE NOW FOR BETTER TRIPS LATER

By Steve Brock

Introduction

This guide consists of a set of worksheets to help you take steps before your next trip that will dramatically increase the quality and fun of that trip.

Here, we'll cover the following areas:

1. Rethink your approach to planning a trip. Here, you'll explore ways to add elements of purpose and passion to your trip planning and the resulting adventures.
2. Rethink your traveling companions. Many great trips are ruined or diminished because we travel with the wrong people or we didn't do our homework before the trip to make sure we were compatible. Here you'll find some key tips and ideas to think through in choosing—and being—the right travel companion.
3. Rethink sustainability. It's an important concept, but one that often overwhelms people. Here you'll learn some simple steps for finding out what *you* can do to be a more responsible traveler in ways that work for you.
4. Rethink empathy. Empathy is a skill you can learn and master. You can practice it here for engaging with people different from you on a trip and then learn from that experience to be more empathetic here at home.
5. Rethink your lenses. You'll discover that people from different occupations and viewpoints can offer rich insights into travel.

Let's get started in preparing for better travel.

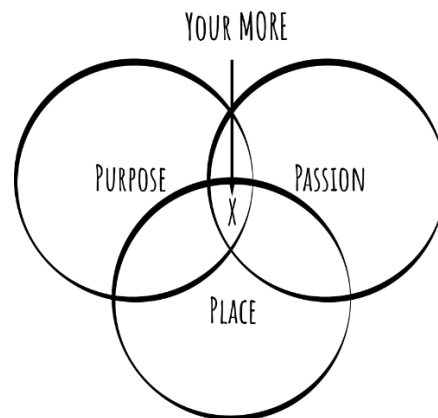
RETHINK HOW YOU PLAN A TRIP

Big idea: Don't just unpack your bags. Unpack your trips to understand what you want to keep and what you want to change on your next trip. Use the downtime when you're not traveling to glean hidden insights from past trips so you can make future ones even better. How?

Look back: Review your trip photos, notes or journal entries from your favorite trip(s)

- Consider this quote from Martine Buber which starts off *Hidden Travel: The Way to More*: “All journeys have their secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.” What does it mean to you?
- Dissect past trips not just for nostalgia, but analytically to determine your own “secret destinations” and magic moments and hidden purpose.
- Start with big picture: Ask yourself, “What have been the seminal moments or turning points in my travel history? Why were these so moving or important to me?”
- Go narrower and focus on a specific trip.
 - Was there a secret destination or pivotal outcome?
 - What were the peak or magical moments?
 - Were there any commonalities between them? If so, what?
 - What was the overt or intended purpose of that trip? For example, was it to see new places, meet new people or have fun? Or was it more intentional and focused? How?

Look forward: Great trips are a combination of Purpose, Passion and Place. Your “more”—that sense of connection, creativity, joy, adventure, meaning or whatever you want more of in life—is found at the intersection of purpose, passion and place.



Let's look at each of these for you.

Purpose:

- For future trips, **how can you add more purpose to your trips?**
 - Start by determining your **Traveler Type** by taking [the Traveler Type Quiz](#).
 - For each trip, ask yourself what you want to:
 - Accomplish personally: A skill to learn (e.g. learn Italian), an experience to have (e.g. white water rafting), a passion to grow (e.g. Thai cooking), a milestone to achieve (e.g. climb Mt. Fuji)
 - Accomplish professionally e.g. improve your writing, decision-making, creativity, interpersonal skills, etc.
 - Be or become: improve a character trait or change a habit e.g. be more outgoing, patient, adventurous or confident; listen better; be more on-time, etc.
 - For each of the above, which can you start working on now?
- **How might you add a theme to your next trip?**
 - Any trip can have a theme. Themes could be around family, a book or movie, history, art, interests or a particular take on the place you're visiting. For example, I traveled to China trip with my graphic designer son. We decided on a theme of "design" and it changed how we viewed everything there, where we went, how we spent our time (e.g. sketching), etc.
 - Think like travel photographers on assignment who create plans for the shots they want to get and the story or theme of the place they want to capture.
 - Can you add a theme to your next trip to give it a sense of purpose and direction?
- **How might you make your trip into a quest?**
 - Which have been your favorite quests in the past (if you've done any)?
 - What are three quests you could incorporate into your next trip?
Some examples:
 - Find the "best of" an item the place is known for.
 - Take a photo of the "best of" a place or experience in that location.
 - Add a special item to a collection (physically as a souvenir that helps locals or digitally as an image)
 - Create a virtual collection (e.g. my examples of doors or all the lamps in Disney World). It gave me an added adventure in addition to the fun my kids were having.
 - Tie your quest to one of the desired accomplishments on your list above.

Passion

In addition to having a sense of purpose, it helps to also know what you most love. In reality, most of us don't really know. We have foggy, general notions but not a real clear sense of what truly delights us. To help clarify that for you, ask yourself these questions.

What delights you?

What moves you?

What energizes you?

When do you enter flow (that state where you lose all sense of time)?

What did you love doing as a child?

How do you play or what's your favorite thing to do as play?

What one thing answers these three questions from Dependable Strengths:

- What are you good at?
- What do you enjoy doing?
- What are you proud of?

Place

Travel is all about places. But you may not have considered all the ways that place can affect your trip, particularly as you plan for your next trip. Answer these to get a sense of what you like best about places.

Let's start with this open-ended question: What factors draw you to a place?

Now let's be more specific. Think of one of your favorite trips. What caused you to go to the places you've loved most on that trip?

Your goal is to identify the factors that delighted you on past trips and learn from them for future trips. To help even further, let's get very specific with the key factors that tend to influence where you'll go on a trip. Think of this as a mini *Guide to Choosing Your Next Destination*. Here goes...

How to determine where to go on your next trip

Here are some starting ideas for factors that determine where you'll go. Use these to build your own list to determine your next trip destination.

- **Budget:** Your budget can affect where you go, how long you're gone, what level of places you stay at, how you eat, etc. But it can also influence the style of travel you choose.
- **Time of year:** What season can you go in or what is a place known for in a particular season (e.g. fall foliage in New England)? This also includes intentionally going somewhere in off-season to avoid crowds.
- **Distance:** How far are you willing to go? How much time do you want to spend in transition? How comfortable are you with less-than-comfortable transport (crowded busses, hours in a van over rough roads, etc.)?
- **Amount of time you have:** This relates to distance and budget as well, but remember that short trips built around purpose, themes or defining moments can be as powerful as long ones.
- **Mood:** Do you want a trip that is adventurous, relaxing, people and parties, quiet and introspective, etc.?

- **Type of place:** What appeals to you most, beach, mountain, desert, city, small town, nature, etc.?
- **Personal interests:** These include hobbies, areas of curiosity, personal passions, etc. This is where you can apply purpose or themes well.
- **Bucket list:** Where have you always wanted to go? If you have several locations on your bucket list, use some of these other factors to choose the one that works best right now.
- **Friends:** This can apply to who you go with, who you go to meet, etc.
- **Language** (do you want a place that speaks your language everywhere (e.g. Australia), in most places (e.g. Norway), hardly anywhere (e.g. rural China)? Or do you want to go learn or practice a particular language?)
- **Food:** Is there a particular cuisine you long to try? Or do you want to build your trip around particular restaurants or types of food? How about cooking classes or regional specialties?
- **Environmental impact:** Can you take public transportation or minimize short flights in one destination better than in another?
- **Transportation choices:** Do you want to avoid planes? Sail on a freighter? Try riding horseback or on a camel? Is cost more important or is the experience? For example, in Europe, renting a car will likely be cheaper than the train for more than two people but trains offer a unique experience. Also, if using airline miles for a ticket, are there restrictions or limited seats to one destination but plenty to another?
- **Events:** Are there sporting events, festivals, concerts, fairs or other activities in a certain place at a certain time you want to see?
- **Opportunities:** Similarly, is there a wedding or business trip that could be extended? Are you traveling to one country that is close to another you've never visited where you could add even a quick side trip? Do you have a friend who has recently moved to a particular country or location that you could now visit?
- **Sales:** Maybe the biggest opportunity of all is this: Is there a deal going on right now? Many a great trip has occurred by getting email alerts on travel deals and then responding.
- **Popularity:** If you've never traveled, perhaps you want to visit the popular places. But because over-tourism is such a growing issue, how might you plan a trip to places that others rarely visit?
- **Other?**

One thing you can do right now is to use local travel to practice connecting purpose, passion and place. Where could you go close to home that could incorporate passion and purpose?

RETHINK WHO YOU TRAVEL WITH

Big idea: *The worst place with the right person can be amazing. The best place with the wrong person can be a nightmare.* Choose wisely or learn to travel solo. To ensure the best trip with someone else, do this:

- Discuss the issues:
 - **How long will you be traveling together?** The longer the trip, the more likely you'll get on each other's nerves if you're not compatible.
 - **Do you have a shared overriding passion or purpose for the trip?** A common interest can overcome other differences.
 - **Is difference the issue?** Sometimes the people who most push our buttons aren't the ones who are very different from us but the ones who are most like us.
- **Practice together** on short trips before a big one
- **Apply this marriage advice** to your traveling companion: *"Whatever you like about the other person will only get better and whatever you dislike will only get worse. So be sure you can tolerate the annoying things since you won't be able to change them."*
- **Know your differences.** Be sure to clarify where each of you stands in these areas:
 - Introverts vs. extroverts
 - Indoor vs. outdoor
 - Vacation for rest vs. vacation for activities
 - Art lovers vs. sports enthusiasts
 - Foodies vs. fuel-fooders
 - Risk-takers vs. risk-avoiders
 - Budget vs. luxury
 - Planning vs. spontaneity
 - Exotic vs. familiar
 - First-timers vs. seasoned travelers
 - Morning larks vs. night owls

RETHINK SUSTAINABILITY

Big idea: Sustainability is bigger but easier to address than you may think. The key is to find what works for you that you can sustain over time.

Realize that with both sustainability and empathy, there are a lot of voices out there that will tell you what to do. But to make a lasting difference, try this:

- Don't get overwhelmed
- Focus on "sustainable sustainability," things you can do now and on your trips over time by finding what works for you that build sustainable *habits* not just temporary actions.
- Start small by trying these simple things:
 - Go fewer places and stay longer.
 - Concentrate on local travel
 - Take trains, bike or use public transportation and when you must fly, opt for direct flights
 - Shop for local produce at farmer's markets
 - Use reusable water bottles (and filters)
 - Reuse as much as you can (bags, containers, hotel towels, towels over paper towels, etc.)
 - Practice slow fashion and slow travel
 - Support local hotels/inns/apartments/hostels, restaurants, stores, travel companies, products and individuals
 - Do little things and also realize that those little things aren't always just about the environment.
 - Travel paperless (but choose carefully where a paper map may be wiser or leave behind paper books)
 - [Buy sustainable products](#)
 - Opt for less-visited locations rather than over-touristed ones
 - Camp and get out into nature
 - Understand why you volunteer
 - Find an area that works best for you (tie it to your purpose for travel)
 - Realize that sustainable travel means protecting the environment, the culture and the economy of the places you visit. All three areas matter.
 - Connect sustainability to your own passions.
 - Review the 17 UN sustainability goals: find yours and do more focused, intentional efforts than many scattered ones. Make YOUR own difference in the world.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



- Recognize the importance of attitude. Chose to:
 - Encourage rather than condemn or shame
 - Focus on hope rather than fear
 - Celebrate what you're doing even as you strive to do more
 - Keep learning. Focus on "clarity over certainty."
 - Just keep trying
 - But beware of The Cobra Effect (unintended consequences like the fact that paper bags produce 15 times the amount of carbon emissions as plastic bags).

RETHINK EMPATHY

Big idea: Empathy is a skill that can be learned and at home to apply to your trips and one that can be refined on a trip so you can apply it at home.

How to approach the issue of empathy in more effective ways --

- In this [National Geographic article](#), they imply that traveling on its own won't make you empathetic. But travel combined with the desire and commitment to seeing the world from others' perspectives can.
- Empathy can be learned and developed. But it does require intentionality.
- Beware the misunderstanding the notion of "lived experience."
 - It does matter. The ancient Hebrews believed you couldn't know something without having done it. We travel, in fact, so that we have the lived experience of being in a place.
 - However, reject the pressure that says, "If you don't have a photo of a place, you didn't really go there." That implies that you have to prove your lived experience to others for your knowledge of something to be valid.
 - Realize that if lived experience were the only valid way of knowing, we'd have:
 - No fiction, literature, history of biographies (only auto-biographies)
 - No movies other than certain documentaries
 - No learning through passed-along stories
 - No science showing how mirror neurons work and how much we gain ourselves through the experience of others
 - Empathy is as much about understanding the emotion rather than the action.
 - Note the example of the actor who asked how she could play a role of a murderer in a play if she'd never killed someone and the director who said, "If you've ever swatted a mosquito in anger, you know the emotion."
- Realize that empathy comes most readily from our brokenness and humility.
 - People care more about your humanity than your competency and respond best to your vulnerability than your expertise.
 - People love to help others when they know that you need the help.
- Where to start:
 - Practice being more interested than interesting.
 - Give your attention, the most valuable gift you have.
 - "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."
Simone Weil

- We all long to be seen and heard and known. Give that gift to others
- Practice non-verbal ways of empathy by [using this test](#) of measuring your ability to read another person's feelings from their eyes alone (a helpful skill in the era of facemasks).
- Practice verbal ways of empathy by [learning and using the 36 questions](#). The key with these (or any good questions that cause you to go deeper with another person) is reciprocity. You ask a question then they respond and ask you one with each question taking you further into closeness.

RETHINK YOUR LENSES

Big Idea: Rethink how you understand travel and the sources that determine your approach to travel. In other words, find different kinds of “guides” to your trip.

Let’s look at a few examples of non-traveling types of professions and what you can learn from each about travel. Then try to find your own.

Full confession with some of these: I’m a bit biased on some because I work in branding now and spent many years as a professional magician. But that’s really the point: How can you take other areas of your life and apply lessons from them to travel?

Here’s what you can learn about travel from a:

- **Branding person** (someone who develops brands for organizations, products or services):
 - Brand vs. Marketing research. In branding, you do research very differently than in general marketing. With the latter, you’re trying to understand every possible aspect of your customer and why they buy your product. With brand research, your goal is only to seek out what a person loves most about that product. The same applies to travel. You’re not in a place to be exhaustive or comprehensive in your understanding of it (unless you’re writing a guidebook). Your goal is to grasp what moves YOU about a particular place. What’s your unique take on it? You’ll never be able to understand everything about a particular place or culture. But you can focus in on understanding what it is about that place or culture that brings you joy.
 - In branding, we say that “Your mission is what you do. Your brand is the unique way you carry out that mission.” A million people may have a similar mission as you which is to visit, say, Ecuador. But what is your unique way of doing that? How will you travel there in a way that no one else can? How will you make a trip truly yours?
 - Take an [Appreciative Inquiry](#) approach by finding and celebrating what brings hope to the people you meet on a trip. Be kind, but even more, be encouraging. Remember the quote about “It’s not what you say that people remember, it’s how you made them feel.” We all want to see ourselves as good, positive people. But travel wears you down and it helps to have techniques you practice before travel like Appreciative Inquiry-type questions and approaches you can use even if you’re not feeling the love for a place.

- **Scientist:** [The Hawthorne Effect](#) essentially states that people behave differently when they are being observed. For travelers this means that you can rarely if ever have a truly “authentic, local” experience because your presence alone will change the dynamics. Don’t mourn that. Celebrate it. Leverage your role as an outsider to help locals see their home in a new way.
- **Filmmaker:** See a place as a location scout or a cinematographer would. Not to take shots like others, but to tell a story of a place or even better tell the story with the place as a character, not just a setting in the story. Or tell YOUR story in that place.
- **Magician:** The basis of a modern-day magic show is this idea of “a willing suspension of disbelief.” That means choosing wonder over cynicism or analysis, mystery over puzzle. Travel can be a mystery or a puzzle. Puzzles you can solve, mysteries you can’t. Learn to know when to treat it as one or the other. Use your imagination to revel in the mystery rather than to solve the puzzle. Also, learning to pace a trip and find the right cadence just like pacing a magic show where you start with a big effect, then move to something simpler, then build from there to your climax. Not every moment on a trip can or should be amazing. You need rests, pauses and downtime to make the big moments shine.
- **Poet or artist:** Artists use their imagination and often seek to inspire. You’ll have better trips when you travel to be inspired more than to be informed. Of course, you want to learn as much as you can about a place because the more you learn, the more you’ll appreciate. But you can never understand a place completely (see above) so stop trying. Instead, approach it like an aficionado rather than an anthropologist (unless you are one and have the time to go deep). Strive to appreciate and be inspired rather than to analyze and know it all. Your goal, unless you’re a journalist or social scientist, is to go to appreciate rather than analyze and to be more inspired than informed.

SUMMARY

- Rethink planning: Plan a trip around Purpose, Passion and Place.
 - Know what you love
 - Seek purpose
 - Connect that in a place
 - Practice connecting purpose and passion in a place close to home
- Rethink who you travel with and don't assume: discuss and practice beforehand.
- Rethink sustainability: Choose the area that matters to you then find ways to practice that (tying it to your purpose) on your trip.
- Rethink empathy: Realize empathy is a skill that requires intentionality and practice. Learn from your trips, apply it at home.
- Rethink your lenses or sources of travel advice: Practice combinatorial thinking and learn from diverse disciplines to make your trips richer and more rewarding.

For more ideas on how to practice travel, plan a trip or connect the world inside you with the world around you, go to www.ExploreYourWorlds.com.