



I began travel blogging 14 years ago. I have written over 1500 blog posts for my own website, and many more as a guest blogger on different sites. If you are new to travel blogging, I hope that this post will help steer you in the right direction and make fewer mistakes than I have done.

Travel blogging is easier today than it has ever been: we all have all the tools we need to produce professional-looking content and share it with the entire world.

Travel blogging is harder today than it has ever been: never have people had so many demands on their attention and time. How will you make your blog shine out?

This is not intended to be an exhaustive guide on the subject. Instead, I will pose lots of questions. Answering them will, I hope, help you steer yourself in the direction that you wish to travel with your travel blog.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first and most vital thing to consider is the travel itself. If you really are at the very beginning of this process, please forget all about travel blogging until you have first made a plan about your actual travels! The travel comes first!

Not only because that is the really fun part and – probably – the strongest driver behind you actually wanting to be a travel blogger. But also because the biggest key to being successful as a blogger is to be authentic.

And if your travels are merely an afterthought, then you will never sound authentic. Go away, get wildly excited about your travel plans, and then we'll carry on!

Ready?

WHAT IS TRAVEL BLOGGING?

For the purpose of this post, travel blogging means “telling the story of your travels on the internet.” You might be cycling round the world, backpacking round Africa, or living in Goa. You might write your story, or create video or take photographs. You might be sharing the tales of your own adventures or offering practical advice – on travelling in a region, travelling a certain way (cheap, light, slow, female, disabled, bicycle), or how to do something (get a job in Oz, cook authentic curry, prepare for an expedition). It doesn't matter what you are doing. Everything here still applies.

WHY DO IT?

You have to do it because you enjoy it. You must. Because, for 99.99% of travel bloggers (myself included), it is a vastly time-consuming exercise with little, if any, immediately tangible reward. If you are not excited about putting in huge amounts of time and effort into telling your story, then I suggest that you stick to communicating through social media. I don't mean that as a slur in any way, for social media is a vast and powerful tool. But if you want to blog well, and to persevere with it, you need to enjoy it.

There are other reasons to blog besides just fun and letting your mum know what you're up to. These include:

- Keeping sponsors happy (on expeditions)
- Becoming established as an authority in your field
- Building up your presence on Google
- Helping you to sell something
- Earning money directly

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITH YOUR BLOG?

Pause for a while and think about this question. It is so important. And virtually nobody (myself included) pays much attention to it in the early days. The current design of my website, and the purpose of everything that I post on here, is designed to further one of these

three aims: to be perceived as an expert in my niche; to get more speaking bookings; to sell books. I hope it does not seem to joyless and mercenary when written down like that. I still love doing this stuff, but I have had to focus harder now that it is also my job.

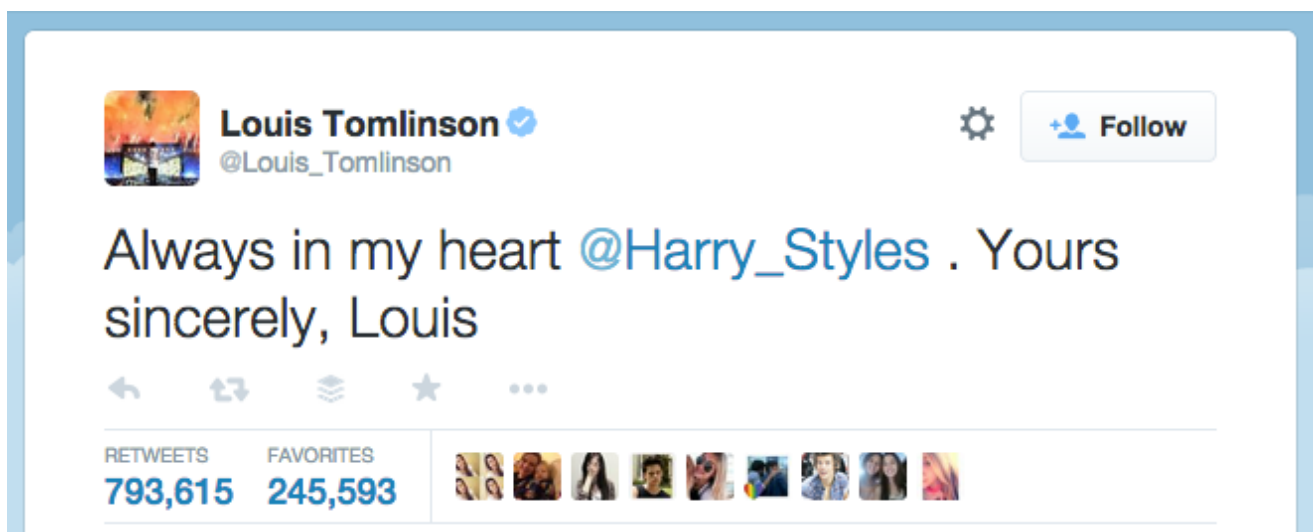
Deciphering what the point of your blog is will help you know which direction you need to travel.

DEFINE YOUR SUCCESS

What will you need to do for your blog to feel “successful”?

Comparing yourself to others on the internet is a mug’s game.

However witty, wonderful or useful your blog might be, you’ll never get close to the 793,615 Retweets that this One Direction Tweet got.



Be realistic with your ambitions. What will make you feel like your efforts have been worthwhile and sufficiently rewarded?

Focus on producing the best quality content you possibly can. Do this over and over again. That is *the* single best thing you can do towards making your blog a success.

5 MISTAKES I MADE WHEN STARTING OUT BLOGGING

- Trying to write about too many subjects
- Caring too much about the 'stats' of my site
- Quantity of blogs rather than quality of blogs
- Underestimating the importance of how a blog looks
- Writing lazy list posts and then struggling to find a decent final point to make up the number I put in the title...

(more on the detail of these later)

6 OTHER COMMON MISTAKES THAT BLOGGERS MAKE

- Sloppy editing
- Poor photography
- Poor titles for blog posts
- Not utilising social media to increase readership
- Not posting frequently enough
- Trying to re-invent the wheel. I get loads of emails from people "launching a new social media blog for travellers to interact with each other." Is it like Facebook? I ask. "Yes, but it's for travellers." Just use Facebook, I suggest.

BLOGGING PLATFORMS

There are loads of different blogging platforms available. I urge you to spend a lot of time looking at blogs online. You'll begin to learn which ones you like, which ones might serve your purpose. Each has their pros and cons. Some are free, some are not. Some are flexible, some are not. Some are blocked in China. Some work better for photos, others for video. Some for short content, others for long essays. Dig around blogs in your niche and you'll begin to get a feel for what appeals. Will people read your stuff on their computers or on their phones? (Hint: smartphones are taking over the world. I suggest you imagine your typical reader to be using their phone. Your blog needs to be 'responsive' – change size according to the screen size people are reading on.)

Here are a few blogging platforms to consider:

- [WordPress.org](#) – what this site is made on. There is also [wordpress.com](#) but I really don't like that. If you are serious about this thing, then [wordpress.org](#) is probably the way to go. You might need to hire a geek to help set it all up
- [Tumblr](#) - trendy, very simple, free, loads of beautiful designs. Content is quite transient – it flows down like a Twitter feed so isn't so good for building up categories of old searchable content. I might use this for a one-off road trip across the US where I wanted to post lots of short content easily and quickly
- [Squarespace](#) – simple, versatile, beautiful, free and paid options
- [Strikingly](#) - simple, versatile, beautiful, free and paid options

- [Blogger](#) - simple, owned by Google, free, ugly, not responsive
- [Medium.com](#) - simple, free, booming, good for long-form writing
- [Facebook](#) – do you need anything else? I considered starting a new blog for my Microadventures. Instead I decided to use Facebook. Good if you want people to interact with your content.
- [YouTube](#) (if you only produce video content)

You might want to dabble with a few of these before you settle on what works for you. The links above will show you that I've tried everything! Once you know what you want you can set about getting it to look how you like.

Many options now look very beautiful for free. But if you are taking the whole thing seriously, then be prepared to pay decent money on your site design and SEO. It is worth it.

FIND YOUR NICHE

You have thought already about what “success” will look like for your blog. A blog can be successful with 1000 readers. It can be a flop with 10,000 readers. It all depends on the goals of your blog.

Here is the key thing to aim towards:

Find your niche, and work to be the best blog in that niche.

Your niche can be whatever appeals to you. It is better to have a narrow, specific niche than a broad niche. It is better to be the expert in a small niche than one of the crowd in a bigger pool.

For example, it is more useful to be *the* authority on travelling in Taiwan, with 1000 wildly enthusiastic fans than to have twice that number of people passing briefly through your site because you rank averagely on blogs about the massively popular topic of backpacking in Australia. If you have **1000 true fans** you have the starting point for a viable business.

So, what is your niche? What is your USP?

Once you know this, you should concentrate all your blogging efforts on it. Find your message, then repeat it, repeat it, repeat it. Bang the same drum over and over again, louder and crisper each time. That is all you need to do. Experiment, tweak, test, evolve, surprise – of course. But do all these things in order to ultimately hone and develop your USP.

1000 TRUE FANS: YOUR TRIBE

Everything you do with your blog should be done with the aim of building **1000 true fans**. Do not try to please everyone. If you do, your blog will be bland and boring. Be exclusive. Ignore those who do not want to play your game. Focus only on those who do want to be in your gang. This is your tribe. Your most precious thing. [You *need* to read **1000 true fans** and **Tribe**.]

You need to talk to them, and listen to them. Email new readers – build a relationship. Answer comments. Ask them what they like and what they don't like. This is your core audience and absolutely critical to the success of your blog.

PRACTICAL BLOGGING TIPS

People have written books on this topic. There are countless blogs on how to blog. I will not try to compete with them. Here are a few things for you to think about though:

- This [31 day programme to improve your blog](#) is a wonderful gold mine. Do it. Make a note in your diary to repeat the whole process in a year's time. Invaluable.
- Work out how frequently you are willing to post. Now stick to that. Occasional blog posts are fine, so long as they are regular. In an ideal world I would suggest posting 3 times a week, but only if you have interesting things to say 3 times a week. Regularity is key, so that your readers grow familiar with the pattern.
- I sit down at the start of each month and schedule all my posts for the next month.
- Use Categories or Tags for every blog post you do, so that people can search back through the archives to find topics that interest them. Do this right from the beginning.
- Experiment with what length of post feels right to you. Long is fine, *if* it is really good. Generally it is better to go for brief posts (unlike this one!) with short sentences, regular paragraph breaks, sub-headings and relevant photographs. Attention spans are short. Eyes jump to what they are interested in. Here is an example of [superb, long blog posts](#). Here is an example of [superb, short blog posts](#).
- “Excuse the long letter, I didn’t have time to write a short one” –

Churchillian wisdom that definitely applies to blogging. Writing a good blog post takes a long time. If you don't have time to write good content, don't write anything at all. I wasted my time and (my few) readers time going through a phase of churning out content for the sake of it. Pointless rubbish like [this](#).

- Reply to comments. Remove spam ones. (If you use WordPress, install Akismet.)
- People love lists. Make them good lists though, not lazy ones.
- Work hard to make your blog titles really good. (Learn the slightly grubby art of linkbait.)
- Link to other blog posts you have done. Work really hard to keep people on your site once you've got them there. In other words, if someone is enjoying this post about blogging, it would be sensible of me to direct them to this post on [making your living out of travel](#)too. I should also take a moment to go to that blog post and add in a link to this one as well. You need to start building up a web of interest, holding people ensnared in fascination in the depths of your blog... For that reason, you need to be cautious about offering tempting reasons to leave the blog. I'd be foolish to tell you about this [hilarious video of a baby panda](#), for example.
- I'm in danger of starting to write a book on the topic here, so I'll just emphasise that you should do this [31 day programme to improve your blog](#), even though it takes you away from my site. It's OK though, because I am helping you, helping my tribe. And if I do that well enough you might return...

SKILLS

You need to work out what you are good at, what you'd like to learn, and what you are going to have to outsource. Things like:

- writing
- photography
- film-making
- recording podcasts
- SEO
- under-the-hood geeky tech stuff
- analysis of your site's traffic stats

SEO

Search Engine Optimisation, also known as Making Google Find You, is a vital part of your blogging life. In the olden days, when I began, it involved all sorts of really boring things like header and alt tags, backlinks and meta whatnots. Boring. Important. Google is cleverer nowadays and harder to trick into believing that you are interesting. Overall though, this is a really good thing. Because it means that if you *are* interesting, then your stuff will shine through.

So my SEO advice to you is simple:

Ignore SEO for now, and just focus on producing exceptional content on your subject over and over again. Give your posts succinct, interesting titles.

If you want to go a little further, think about what questions people

might ask Google that you are able to solve on your blog. Now write blog posts specifically on those topics. Neither the title, nor the depth, of this blog post are coincidence. If you begin playing this game, be sure to keep producing *good* stuff, not just rubbish that will trick people to clicking a link on Google. You can trick people to your site once, but that's not going to develop into regular readers ([Tent Porn](#), anyone?)

ANALYTICS

I strongly advise you not to worry about the analytics of your site for at least a few months. Nothing matters more than generating really great content. Focus on that. It's worth setting up Google Analytics though, for when the time comes to delve into your audience's behaviour.

A few years ago I got totally addicted to checking the traffic statistics for my website. So I went cold turkey and banned myself. Now I never look at them at all. I'm going to break the habit now, and have a peek at the key indicators that matter on your blog. Knowing what these indicators are will help you craft a better blog. The internet is full of advice for you if you want to delve deeper into this side of blogging.

- **Bounce Rate**

This is the percentage of people who leave your website after visiting just one page. You want it to be as low as possible. Mine was 64% last year. The more enticing links you provide, and the more reasons you offer to entice the reader deeper into your site, the more likely they

are to hang around rather than “bounce” away to another site.

- **Average Session Duration**

How long people stay on your site each time they visit. The longer the better. Quality content is key (as always). The more enticing links you provide, and the more reasons you offer to entice the reader deeper into your site, the more likely they are to hang around. Mine was 2 minutes 46 last year. The internet is all about short attention spans and making the most of those.

- **Sessions**

This is how many people visit your site. It’s a number you can use to boost your flagging spirits when you think nobody is reading. Nice, but not very helpful. More useful is to ask yourself – “what would I like to convert these people into doing?” Commenting on the blog? Sharing on social media? Buying something?

Look also at how many visitors return (40% in my case). Why are they not coming back? How can I entice them to keep hanging around? Can I tempt them to sign up to my email list so that I can tell them when interesting things are happening?

I’m going to stop this section here, before I get carried away. Explore around Google Analytics and you’ll see, in real time if you like, what sites people are visiting your blog from, what they are searching for on Google to discover you, where in the world they are visiting from and much, much more.

Neglect at your peril. I neglect mine entirely. I shouldn’t.

GROWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Promise me, before you begin this bit, that you are busy and excited about your travel plans and that you are focussed on producing regular quality content for your blog. You are? OK.

Only now should you think of things like promoting your blog on social media. I get so many emails from people saying “please will you promote my blog on Twitter?” and when I look at that blog it is brand new and has one measly entry. It’s pointless!

But you are up and running now. Your blog is filling with great stuff. It’s time then to grow your audience.

Here are some things you need to do (and probably need to Google for specific advice on as this is a vast and time-consuming field):

1. Begin gathering email addresses for a newsletter. This is absolutely vital and critical and essential. Do it! Focus on it regularly. I do: look you can sign up for mine [here](#) or at the bottom of this post. Your mailing list are your true fans. The ones who will buy stuff. The ones who will hear from you even if they forget to check your blog. These people are sacred. Look after them! I’d recommend Mailchimp or Tiny Letter for your group, though I use Google Groups. (How to write good newsletters is another blog entry in itself!)
2. Set up an automated system so that whenever you update your blog, an update will post on Twitter and Facebook.
3. Start promoting your blog on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Buffer and any other social media site that

feels important to you. Each of these sites requires a different tone from you. Each one requires that you are not just a bore who bangs on about their own site all the time. Become an expert in your niche. Promote other good content. Answer people's questions. Help other people. And – occasionally – push your own content too. (This is a [good book](#) to read on this *vast* and ever-evolving topic.)

4. Spend time visiting and engaging with all the other blogs in your niche. A great thing about blogging is that the people who may be your “rivals” can actually easily become collaborators and friends instead. The internet is not zero sum: helping other people will not shove you backwards. Leave comments, answer questions. Do the same on forums.

EARN CASH

Almost no-one makes decent money directly from their blog. I earn my living from the [talks](#) I give and the [books](#) I sell, and quite a few of those come about indirectly via my blog. [Notice I linked to them there – never miss a chance to gently make it easier for the reader to get to the place you'd like them to get to...]

However, it certainly *is* possible to earn money from your blog. Here are a few ways:

- Adsense adverts – I've used them. They looked ugly, I earned pennies
- Amazon affiliate links – if you have a lot they can add up. I've never quite got round to bothering

- Letting people write blog content for you in exchange for cash. I get about 5 email requests a week from people wanting to do this. They offer \$20-\$100 a time, write a blog post which contains a link to a website they are trying to promote, and you put it on your site. A very quick way to totally discredit your authentic voice
- Find people who will advertise on your site. A few years ago I was earning a few grand a year from this, but it has totally dried up now. I'm not sure if that is the advertising model, my blog, or my efforts to woo these companies
- Sell something. The best thing to do. Sell books, ebooks, consultancy sessions on your expertise, handicrafts – anything. Shopify and PayPal make this so easy to do

Here is a [great post from a couple who've managed to turn their travel blog into their job](#).

CONCLUSION

If you want to begin as a travel blogger I would focus on these key points and just gradually begin figuring out everything else:

- What is your niche? What is your USP?
- How would you describe your blog in a couple of sentences?
- Start producing regular, excellent content.
- Commit to learning new, relevant skills.
- Begin to tell the world what you are doing via social media.

Good Luck!