

Meet a Guidebook Author

Lebawit Lily Girma, author of Moon guides to Belize and to the Dominican Republic

Describe your first brush with wanderlust.

I grew up overseas [Girma was born in Ethiopia and raised on the Ivory Coast], so travel has always been an inextricable part of my life. But that first brush with wanderlust happened when I was boarding a plane to England at 14 years old. I was heading to my new boarding school in Bournemouth and I remember the adrenaline—a mix of fear and excitement—knowing I was heading to Europe, a new continent, and away from family for the first time. From the ride to the airport to experiencing an international flight and landing in a new place where I now had to speak another language, I was hooked.

What does it take to be a guidebook author today?

Aside from the expected skills of writing concisely, being organized, and being observant, you need to have good social media skills. Instagram and Facebook in particular are a huge part of marketing a destination, with more people searching for travel tips and inspiration online and on these platforms. You should also have decent photography skills. As a guidebook writer, you're expected to help promote the book, and might be asked to share images from the road.

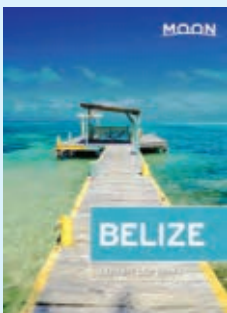
When writing a guidebook, how do you strike a balance between covering the must-sees and leading readers off the beaten path?

I keep an eye out for the unusual places and things to do, but I make sure these are consistent before I include them. I want to know that a year from now this place or activity will still be there and still be amazing. There are no guarantees, but with practice one can almost tell right away what's reliable and what isn't. I try to keep it balanced by including those historic, cultural sights that are too big to leave out, and mentioning a few things that represent the essence of the destination and will remain with the traveler long after he or she has left. I always make sure there are places you wouldn't know of unless you had my book, and that comes from years of living and experiencing the destination.

What can a guidebook offer that a web search can't?

When you only use digital info, it's hard to distinguish what's accurate and what's honest. With guidebooks, you know who the author is, and that author takes a lot of time reviewing places and giving an authentic take on them. As professional travel writers, they have a reputation and thus a vested interest in putting out their best work. They're on the ground, scoping out what's worth telling, and they save travelers hours and hours of online research. Lastly, guidebooks are always available whether or not you have access to wi-fi or the electricity goes out—and that is crucial when you're on the road.

—A.A.



are wondering, 'Can I or can't I?' we want to give them the advice and information they need to give it a go."

Special interests are also driving travel decisions these days, Pickard says, and Lonely Planet's forthcoming publications follow suit. A widespread decade-long enthusiasm for culinary travel shows no sign of slowing, and Lonely Planet tapped its far-flung network of local experts for August's *Ultimate Eats*, which Pickard describes as a ranking of "the 500 most memorable food experiences in the world, whether it's Noma in Copenhagen or a hole-in-the-wall curry house in Punjab."

Cruising is a travel interest that Pickard acknowledges Lonely Planet would never have covered 30 years ago, but he says the niche has broadened to include more options for exploratory on-shore adventures. In June, the publisher is releasing Cruise Ports guides for Alaska, the Caribbean, and Scandinavia. The last title joins a full menu of existing Lonely Planet products devoted to the region as a whole, its individual countries, and major cities.

"Those countries are at the vanguard of world culture in ways they hadn't been before," Pickard says, pointing to trending interest in their progressive governments, food, design, and lifestyle. Scandinavia also offers opportunities for the kinds of nature travel and city visits that he says have become increasingly in-demand.

