

60 Second Interview

SECTION ONE: Biography



Maureen Wheeler, Founder of Lonely Planet

Maureen was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. At age 20 she moved to London, where she met Tony Wheeler. While they were establishing Lonely Planet, Maureen completed a degree in social work, but then committed herself full-time to developing the business.

Maureen was responsible for organising the very successful Lonely Planet travel summits held in 1994 (to celebrate the company's 21st birthday) and again in November 1997.

Maureen has been the driving force behind Lonely Planet's corporate contributions program established to provide financial assistance for humanitarian projects in developing countries.

In 2007, Maureen and Tony sold 75% of Lonely Planet to BBC Worldwide, they remain on the board of Lonely Planet.

The Planet Wheeler Foundation established in 2008 supports educational and health projects in the developing world and is funded solely by the Wheelers.

Maureen is an associate professor at the La Trobe University School of Tourism and Hospitality, Faculty of Law and Management, and served two terms as director on the board of Tourism Tasmania, and one term on each of the board of Tourism NT and Opera Melbourne.

SECTION TWO: Question & Answer

Question 1: After twenty-eight years of working in the travel publishing industry, what is it that you love about it so much?

Actually it is more like 37 years and I would have to say it is the travel – what better job than to travel around the world and then write about it?

Question 2: Lonely Planet books are a bible to anyone who is going travelling, what do you feel are the key characteristics of your books that make them so valuable to travellers?

I think they are authentic, practical and amusing, everything a good travel companion should be.

Question 3: When you arrived in Australia after your journey across Asia with 27c in your pocket, it must have taken great tenacity to publish your first book - what was the key motivating factor that kept you going?

It was fun, writing the book then taking it around the shops and selling it was great, everyone was so enthusiastic about it and we enjoyed talking about our trip to anyone who was interested.

Tenacity was most needed when we began to change from being travellers who published books to publishers who travelled, ie when Lonely Planet became a real business and we had real responsibilities.

Question 4: How do you define success? And to what do you most attribute your success?

Success is doing something you love and getting paid for it. I think I would have to say I attribute our success to tenacity.

Question 5: What impact do you think new technology such as Apple iPads, allowing consumers immediate access to online information and e-books, will have on the publishing industry?

It is already having a huge impact on the publishing industry, you can see what is happening to newspapers as a precursor to what will happen to books, but books will survive and I think more people are engaged in reading and writing than ever before.

Question 6: What's the best advice you've been given?

Live within your means

Question 7: If you could talk to one person from history, who would it be and what question would you ask them?

Shakespeare – Did you really write all those plays and sonnets?

Question 8: The Global Financial Crisis impacted many disposable incomes around the world, which resulted in many people cutting down on spending. With travel being a luxury for most, how did the GFC impact your business?

The GFC hasn't had a huge impact on our business, we did have a drop in sales 18 months ago but we our market share has steadily increased in all markets and we have been seeing a corresponding increase in profits over the past 10 months.

Question 9: Ireland has one of the largest and strongest Diasporas in the world. What role would you like to see the Irish abroad play in supporting Ireland's return to economic growth?

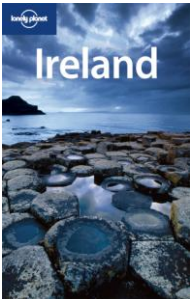
Talk up Ireland as a tourist destination and come back with your families to travel around the country and spend money.

Question 10: Although you haven't lived in Ireland for thirty years, is there anything you miss about living there?

When I come back to Ireland I feel as though I haven't really been gone, I miss my friends and family and the landscape always moves me in a way nowhere else does.

And one for good luck... What do you like to do in your free time?

Read, listen to opera and go to iTunes and buy music by rock bands I know nothing about.



Lonely Planet has recently released a new edition of their Ireland travel guide. For more information please visit:

http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/Primary/Region/EUROPE/Western_Europe/Ireland/PRD_PRD_2885/Ireland+Travel+Guide.jsp?bmUID=1278987024334