

APA PUBLICATIONS
founded 1970 in Singapore



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our celebration of Apa Publications' golden anniversary!

When Hans Hoefer created the very first *Apa Guide to Bali* and set up Apa in Singapore in 1970, who could have predicted the rollercoaster journey that the business would go on over the next fifty years? Apa has changed with the times and the company's journey is a reflection of the travel industry through times of growth, recession, digital revolution and now, consideration of a sustainable future.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the creation of this special book commemorating Apa's fiftieth anniversary, especially Sarah Clark for managing and editing the project and all the willing contributors from Apa's history. In addition, thank you to all Apa employees for their daily hard work and contribution to the success of the business; to those from the past who helped build Apa into what it is; and especially to Agnieszka Mizak, our Managing Director, for her incredible efforts and achievements in running the business.

Despite facing challenging market conditions at times in the past – and no doubt also in the future – I am truly honoured to lead Apa through the storm, and proud of the weight of the company's heritage on my shoulders. We all know that we are still going through a transformation process, and talking about it and experiencing it every day are somewhat different. But make no mistake, I have a great desire to leave Apa in much better shape than I found it when I arrived.

It is a great pleasure to own Apa and I feel a big responsibility to secure the current 60+ jobs (twice the number from when I took over) and the development of the business to build a company that will cruise through the challenges of the 21st Century as a relevant enterprise. Despite what we have achieved in the last six years, I feel there is much more still to do to get to the point where we can say: Apa is a truly digital business. And this is what we need to achieve so that I will be able to hand over the reigns to the next generation. We are proud to say that we're still standing, and more than that – we're thriving and innovating, always pushing for that next level.

René Frey (CEO – Apa Publications)
February 2020

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

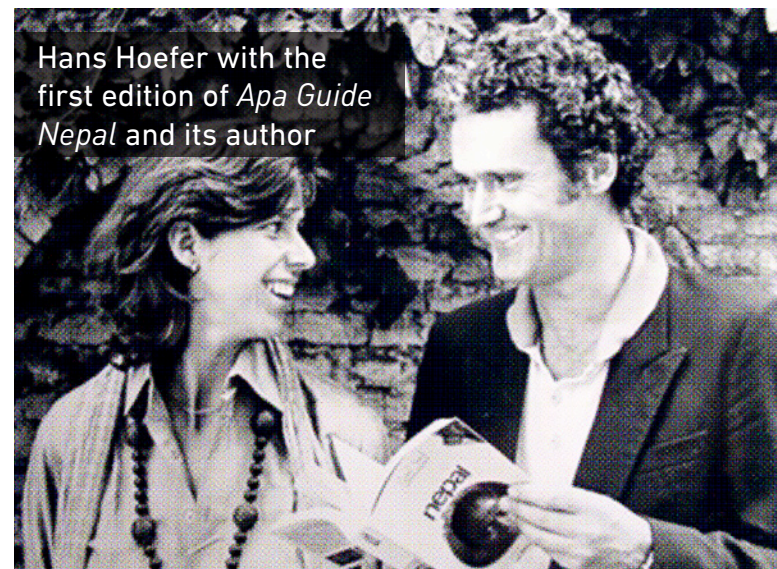
"Hans Hoefer left Germany in 1968 in a Volkswagen bus... he never made it to Australia."

As the 1960s drew to a close, a young artist found himself on the Indonesian island of Bali. Bali's colourful people and culture captivated him and he made a living selling his paintings of the island to tourists. But he was frustrated by the lack of easily available information about Bali: where did the people's unique beliefs and rituals originate? How did their rich art develop? And how did these enhance understanding of the island's burgeoning tourist sites? He searched for a guidebook that would explain the island's history and culture as well as describe its places. It would give an insight into its people's values and politics. It would use strong visual images to communicate directly the atmosphere of the destination and the everyday life of its inhabitants. He couldn't find such a book, so he decided to create it.

APA'S FOUNDER

Hans Hoefer was born in 1943 in Stuttgart, in former West Germany. A passionate traveller from a young age, Hans hitchhiked in neighbouring countries during his school holidays. After an apprenticeship in typesetting and printing, in 1963 he started a four-year art school programme, while continuing to travel; both were financed through the unusual side hustle of exporting second-hand Mercedes cars to Iran on a twice-yearly basis, then hitchhiking his way home through the Middle East. When Hans graduated in 1968, he loaded up a Volkswagen bus and set off for Australia, travelling overland through Nepal and winding up exploring much of southeastern Asia.

The late 1960s were the heyday of the "hippie trail", but while Hans had taken that road, he was shrewder about how



travel was opening up previously little-tapped destinations. While travel guidebooks existed, such as Germany's Baedeker guides, independent travel publishing was practically non-existent for Asian destinations at this time. Drawing on his experience and spotting the need for a deeper cultural overview of Bali than was available, as well as detailed practical information, Hans obtained sponsorship from the local InterContinental hotel group to produce something different and unique: a "bookazine", mixing elements of magazine-style editorial design, evocative photography and in-depth journalism, all in a book format. The content was to emphasise the island's cultural background and extensively explore what to do and what to see in the destination.

In 1970, Hans and the InterContinental Group published this first book, entitled *Apa Guide to Bali*. Packed with thoughtful essays on local culture, vivid, full-colour pictures and a directory of practical information, it was backed as an "official guide" by the Governor of Bali and hailed for its promotion of tourism to the island, something that was only in its nascent stages at this time. The critical reception to the book was excellent – within a year of publication, it had won an award from the American Popular Photography Magazine for "best book promoting travel" and a gold medal from the American Society of Travel Agents. Apa Guides were up and running.

ESTABLISHING THE COMPANY

In 1970, Hans decided to move to Singapore. Here, he founded Apa Productions, the first private colour photography laboratory and picture archive for professional photographers in Asia. Alongside this and spurred on by the experience and success of his first guidebook, Hans

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Over the years, many people have asked where the "Apa" name came from. According to Hans, "Apa is a fundamental question word in Bahasa Melayu, the lingua-franca in many southeast Asian countries; it has a fluid meaning that can be: what, where, when or how".

However, a slightly less evocative interpretation is that "Apa" originates from "Asia Photo Archive", the name of Hans' Singapore business.

The main book series was branded Insight Guides from the early 1980s.

built on the publishing model that had worked so well for Bali; creating more independent guidebooks to nearby Asian destinations such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. As with Bali, these books had a unique profile, with their distinctive design and journalistic editorial. Their particular strength lay in the magazine-style, in-depth background essays on the culture of a place, and the lavish photographs. No other travel publisher was doing this and by the 1980s, the concept – now branded Insight Guides – had found its market.

The business was predicated on a special sales model, with sales to tourist industry operations such as hotels financing all production and printing costs. Consumer trade sales were initially a bonus and in fact, the books only entered the retail world via sales to hotel shops. For the company's first 20 or so years, pre-publication sales to the tourism industry – initially in Asia, before expansion to the rest of the world – was the business model for the books.

Siu Li Teo, who started at Apa in 1987 as a Sales Service Executive and later became the company's Marketing Manager and then long-standing General Manager from 1991, remembers: "Hans Hoefer's vision back in the 1970s/80s was to have a company with organic growth. He was always talking about his 'string of pearls', which in his definition meant that we should take over and control where our books are printed (so that gave birth

to Apa Press) and manage our own distribution network: i.e. cut out the middlemen and sell directly to book stores and chains – thus creating Apa Hong Kong, and Apa Singapore/Malaysia."

This creative control over all aspects of the publishing process and supply chain would stand Apa in good stead for its next venture: translations of its books.

INTERNATIONAL EDITIONS

As the 1970s progressed into the 1980s, Apa Productions continued to grow and expand. A key aspect of the company's development were the partnerships formed with copublishers around the world, particularly in Europe. Pitching up annually at Frankfurt Book Fair – still the most important rights convention for publishers today – Apa took a big stand and announced its presence. As Siu Li recalls, "Frankfurt Book Fair was interesting as Apa always came up with creative stands designed by Hans and his good friend Poffi. Each year, we had to set up the stand without the aid of contractors. One year we could be cutting bamboo until our hands hurt, another year, we might be putting up a space age contraption that was harder than putting together Ikea furniture."

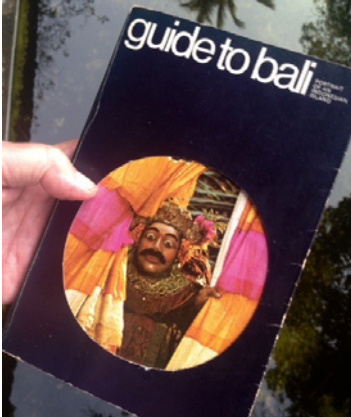
This prime marketing opportunity opened up new relationships and before long, Apa had partners in the Netherlands, France, Italy and Poland, among others. Handily, because Hans had established Apa's own printing press in Jurong, an industrial area of Singapore, in the early 1980s, Apa was able to offer to produce and print copies of the various copublisher editions of the books, rather than simply selling rights. Sharing promotional materials and removing production headaches for partners made Apa a valuable partner.

In Hans' native Germany, the books were published – as they still are – under the original Apa Guide name. Hans' longtime collaborator, Dieter Vogel, worked from his home in Munich to commission translators and edit the German publications. The translations worked both ways – some books were originally written in German and then translated back to English.

A SINGAPORE POWERHOUSE

Singapore remained the corporate headquarters and hub for all Apa's activities. Siu Li remembers, "the 80s were a great time to be in Singapore. The

The very first *Apa Guide to Bali*



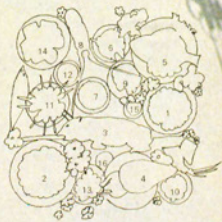
Apa Guide to Bali took a fresh and in-depth look at the island's culture





Vivid photography was one of the series' USPs from the start

foods for a feast...



Framed with style and filled with flavor, the Indonesian rice table introduces you to a variety of island specialties. *Nasi goreng* (1), variety of island specialties, meats, and spices; and rice fried with shrimps, meats, and spices; and *hakmi goreng* (2), fried noodles, are the basis

economy was robust and growing very quickly. Apa Singapore at that time was a small set-up in the backwaters of an industrial estate called Jurong where if you stayed too late in the evening, there was no way out of the estate as public transport ground to a halt. You had to call a taxi, which was difficult in itself, because most drivers were afraid to travel that way due to rumours of war-time ghosts roaming the streets. It was generally a swamp. Apa chartered a bus to ferry its staff to and from work every day at a specific time. Marketing, administration and editorial were housed on the first floor of the building and was known as Apa Productions at that time, whilst the printing presses were housed downstairs known as Apa Press.

Apa Singapore was Utopia in many ways. Unlike the usual typical Singapore company set-up, working hours were comparatively short because of how difficult Jurong was to get to on public transport. I think that's one of the reasons why we never had a lot of staff leaving the company. Everyone was happy and so long as the job was done, no one made a fuss. We ran the company like a big family. I think most of the staff stayed for more than 10 years or until they retired."

By this time, Apa was producing ever more guides, with distinctive front covers featuring local faces. The package on offer had long been unique, but there were some new players in the

market. In France, Gallimard launched their own travel series, a serious competition in the European market, and in 1972 and 1982 respectively, the first Lonely Planet guides and Rough Guides were published, heralding the start of an expanded travel guide market. Never one to stand still, Hans now had his eye on expanding the company's breadth to cover new parts of the world.

MY FAVOURITE DESTINATION

All and none. A lifetime of intensive travel and work in over 120 countries denudes preferences. But I commute constantly between my homes in Singapore and the old city of Galle in Sri Lanka.

Hans Hoefler

Hans, his Bali editor and a growing range of Apa Guides



Hans and his VW bus exploring Asia's sights

GROWING THE BUSINESS

"Our motto was 'expect the unexpected'. But that was what made Apa unique and memorable."

In the early 1980s, Hans Hoefer decided it was time to expand Apa Productions' list from specialising solely in Asian destination travel guides to exploring pastures new: North America. Establishing a base in Honolulu in Hawaii, with Leonard Lueras as editorial director, yielded *Insight Guide Hawaii*, which became a best-seller within weeks of its release in 1980. *Florida* and *Jamaica* followed close behind. This was a radical change of focus for a company that took a distinctively Asian point of view and destination remit, but as ever, all the books were immense labours of love, curated and written by deeply knowledgeable experts.

HOW TO BUILD AN INSIGHT GUIDE

In the introduction to the first edition of *Insight Guide Mexico* in 1983, we get a glimpse of the process that led to the creation of the book. In



our globalised world today, it is a fascinating look at the journey of discovery that was deciding to create a book, all the on-the-ground travel involved and research required – with no Google to check at the touch of a button.

"Por qué? Why, people would ask, is a Singapore-based publishing company so interested in producing a thorough and elegant book about distant Mexico? That question was asked often during the year and a half Apa Productions' editorial team travelled about Mexico and created *Mexico*, the book you are now holding in your hands...when [Kal] Müller [the writer] began work on *Mexico*, he thought he'd be able to cover Mexico in about six months. He soon found that he had grossly underestimated the size and complexity of the project. In the end, it took him more than a year and a half of writing, travelling and photographing (some 20,000 photographs' worth) just to include Mexico's most important areas. Indeed, Müller says he did enough crash reading in Mexican literature, history, economics and culture to earn the equivalent of a doctoral degree in Mexican studies."



Hans presenting at a distributors' workshop at Würzburg Schloss

The thoughtful, in-depth research and writing that went into these first editions of Insight Guides is the foundation for all subsequent versions of the books, the vast majority of which are still in print today in recent forms. And the books were recognised in their time, too, winning special awards for Excellence and Professionalism from the Pacific Area Travel Association in the early 1980s.

Singapore remained the nerve centre of the business, despite the expansion into the Pacific and Americas region, with its own printing press. As Siu Li Teo, General Manager of the Singapore office, recalls, “In the 1980s, Hans believed in organic growth as in controlling the food chain, so to speak. He had the vision that costs would be cheaper if we bought our own raw material and produced the books ourselves. If he could, he would have wanted to do pre-

press (as in converting photos and text to film) as well. The idea was that we would not be in the control of an external printing house with inflexible timelines and we could also control the quality of the printing with Hans’ background experience. Print runs and reprints could be done as and when the need arose. This worked exceptionally well for us.”

AN EDITORIAL LEGACY

Brian Bell passed away in 2014, but his impact as long-time Editorial Director at Apa and founder of the London office is clear. Hans Hoefer recalls the development of the business at this time as “smooth sailing...Brian deserves big credit for editorial people management throughout Europe”. Dorothy Stannard, his Executive Editor for many years, said in his eulogy: “Brian’s style of management might be described as *Primus inter pares* (first among equals), a collaborative approach symbolised by the so-called round table [in the office] around which we would track targets, discuss layouts, chat and have lunch. In reality, Brian was the rock on which we leaned in stormy times and the springboard from which we flew”.

STARTING UP IN LONDON

By the late 1980s, Hans was envisaging a great expansion into Europe and decided that London should be the base for this next step. To do this, he appointed Brian Bell, an experienced journalist and editor, to set up Apa’s first European office. The establishment of the London HQ heralded the start of Apa’s first “golden age”, as the company ramped up its output and profile for the rest of the century.



Northern Ireland-born Brian’s involvement came about when he called in at Apa’s Singapore offices in 1983, in the capacity of his role as Managing Editor of the colour magazine supplement of *The Observer*, Britain’s oldest Sunday paper. According to the introduction to the first edition of *Insight Guide Ireland* in 1986, “His intention was to raid Apa’s celebrated photographic library for material to accompany a series of features on Southeast Asian countries he was preparing for his magazine. Apa, he learned, was planning to extend its range of internationally acclaimed Insight Guides to cover Europe’s leading travel destinations.” Two years later, at the beginning of 1985, Brian was commissioned to take on the project management of the Ireland guide.

In 1988, Hans charged Brian with establishing a base from which to launch more European titles. The first thing he did was to place an advertisement in *The Guardian* newspaper, seeking writers, editors and photographers with knowledge and expertise in particular countries and regions. Dorothy Stannard, then working at *Punch* magazine and with a strong interest in Morocco, was one of the writers who answered the ad:

“Brian tended to favour journalists rather than traditional travel writers. His own experience was journalistic and Insight’s particular strengths during this period were its magazine-style background essays and photographs. No other travel publisher was doing this. Brian’s modus operandi was to appoint a project editor with specialist knowledge of a destination to commission a team of locally based writers (often stringers and expat writers) and then edit the text and pictures. This usually entailed travelling to the destination to commission the team and do preliminary research, and later taking another trip to check the copy. It was a dream gig.

“Initially, Brian ran the London operation out of his basement flat in Notting Hill. The flat became a hive of activity, as freelance editors and photographers popped in to pitch ideas, deliver copy, or edit transparencies over the two light boxes. After leaving the *Punch* office at 5.30pm, I would head up to Brian’s Notting Hill flat to picture edit my book on Morocco. There would generally be one or two other editors there, a bottle of red on the go and Miles Davis playing in the background.”

MY FAVOURITE DESTINATION

“Brian and I used to laugh a lot about how we both are in the travel business but we spend more time travelling with our minds than we do actually travelling. We are the true-blue armchair travellers. My favourite destination from the very few countries that I have visited is still England. It’s green and lush, full of history, lovely gardens, lakes, castles and ruins to explore, and not to mention it has some very lovely people too.”

Siu Li Teo

A CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT

The London operation soon outgrew Brian’s flat, and the first London office was established in a business centre for start-ups in the Victoria area of the city, a forerunner to today’s WeWork-type operations. By this point, Brian had recruited a small team of regular contributors. Dorothy joined the staff in 1992, eventually becoming Brian’s deputy. The team also moved on again, this time to larger premises on The Cut near Waterloo station, where they had three floors, a basement lined with lightboxes...and an attic for visiting Singapore staff to stay in.

Siu Li recalls, “The Cut premises was an interesting place for the Singaporean staff. It was a hardship tour of duty for editors who got sent up to London from Singapore to help clear deadlines. Pretty bohemian as they had to live in the attic of the office and take their shower at the Waterloo station. Thankfully, it didn’t extend to the sales staff but that was because we managed to get barter exchanges for advertisements at places like the famous Halcyon at Holland Park.”

At this time, there was just a small band of editors led by Brian Bell, including Andrew Eames and Martha Ellen Zenfell, plus eventually, a full-time art director, cartographic editor and picture manager. Despite the more formal office setting, there was still a creative, bohemian feel to the working environment. As Dorothy says, “there were so many mavericks, especially in the early days, but pride of place would have to go to Hans Hoefer himself, who was very creative and intermittently extremely hands-on. Hans would descend like a whirlwind on the London office, immediately getting stuck into a picture edit – at midnight – and generally turning projects on their head. We would be exhausted by the time he flew off to attend to his “other interests”. He would often come bearing gifts – on one occasion two durians.”

Siu Li echoes this view of Apa’s founder: “Hans is a very interesting boss to work for. You have to expect the unexpected when you are with him. In our meetings with the distributors and co-publishers, you just didn’t know which direction he was going to take when negotiating a deal. Most times I had to wing it and crossed my fingers that I was following the right lead. Distributors were usually terrified and in awe of the man at the same time. He has a very brilliant mind but usually unconventional.”



Appropriately for a company that is committed in its present form to digital innovation, its founder was also aware early of the potential of the burgeoning internet.

“Hans also had a lot of foresight”, says Siu Li. “I remember him coming into my office one day excitedly asking me whether I had heard about the worldwide web. Now, this was just when it launched and he said we should try and tap into it as fast as possible. Much to my regret, the team took too long to catch on to this idea as we were launching many new products at the time.” Apa was certainly not the usual ordinary, conventional company set-up, but it was working, as the teams launched ever more books and series into the market.



Editorial Director Brian Bell (far left), US editor Martha Ellen Zenfell and German editor Dieter Vogel at Frankfurt Book Fair, 1993

NEW SERIES AND NEW IDEAS

Throughout the 1990s, Apa’s business was expanding rapidly, thanks to the decentralised editorial set-up that allowed growth in both Asian and Western destination lists. In addition to the main Insight Guides series, Insight Pocket Guides were launched in 1991, with the literal strapline: “Recommendations for a short stay”. These slimline, pocket-sized books initially focussed on European destinations that were increasingly reached on short-hop flights, as the budget airline business began to develop. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War in 1989, Europe was ripe for new discovery and greater accessibility. The Pocket Guides differed from the essay structure and magazine-style spreads of the main Insight Guides series, by featuring a collection of itineraries with detailed directions and suggestions for refreshment stops along the way. They took a colloquial, personal tone – a sense of the writer guiding the reader along the way. Although much modernised, the genesis of these books lives on today in the Insight Guides Explore series.

“I remember these days particularly fondly”, Dorothy says. “The mid-90s was a time of great expansion for Insight and it was a golden age for travel guides generally. Eastern Europe was opening up, and budget airlines made travel cheaper. We worked long hours, but it was creative and collaborative. Best of all, we travelled!”

Following the success of the Pocket Guides, Tony Gulliver [then Halliday], a Managing Editor in London, was tasked with overseeing the launch of another small format series, Insight Compact





Hans and the printing team, Singapore

Guides. At this time, some of Insight's books were still translations of original German editions, but this was slightly different: a translation of the German publisher Langenscheidt's Polyglott series into English. As with the original Insight Guides, they were to be visually distinctive, with a modern, graphic design and lots of margin pictures. Tony recalls: "We started the Compact Guides with a batch of 18 European city guides. We managed to get them all out at just about the same time, and when the final courier left for Singapore sometime in 1994, a big cheer went up around the office."

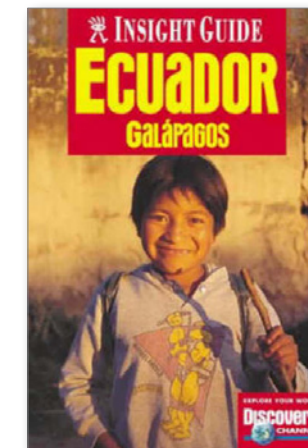
Tony remembers fondly his colleagues from that time, the small and supportive team, and "the very nip and tuck methods we employed to get everything done (basically doing a multitude of jobs at the same time). The inspiration we got from Brian Bell and the way he encouraged us to develop a range of skills, so I came to do a lot of design as well as editorial, and kept up my photography as well." Indeed, the all-hands-on-deck mentality and multi-skilled approach contributed to many passion-project Insight Guides at this time, all of which are infused with huge amounts of care.

Apa was also innovating visually again. Tony explains: "We later commissioned new titles, notably 'Local Compacts' to UK cities and regions. New photography was shot for all the books and I believe this was the first travel guide series for which photographers were commissioned to go and shoot titles for a fee rather than getting pictures from libraries or personal stock. We started with students from the London College of Printing and it developed from there. The approach transformed travel guide publishing."

Siu Li concludes, "I would say that the 1990s were glory days for Apa and it was a remarkable place to work at this time. We launched around 20 new titles a year, plus updates, between 1992 and 1996. We were also signing a lot of co-publishing deals during that time with publishers from Spain, the Netherlands, Taiwan, Denmark. Production and book sales could not have been better. We managed to set up our Asian sales/distribution offices in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore at this time, and that gave us some direct input into the retail business. Everyone was busy and the editorial teams were just exhausted churning out the books and meeting deadlines. Book distributors and co-publishers were happy as the guides made up a substantial percentage in their sales."

There were opportunities, too, for all arms of the business to get together and trade ideas. Each year, Hans would organise a distributors' workshop in a schloss near Frankfurt (see picture, page 11). These workshops were designed to introduce the "Apa family" to the new titles, advertising and promotional materials. The workshop was usually a full-on day of immersion in all things Apa, followed by a group dinner. It was Hans' way of helping the distributors and co-publishers to get to know one another, and to share ideas on how to promote the products further.

Apa Productions and Insight Guides were a resounding success, as the 20th century began to draw to a close. But Hans was mulling a change. His long-term strategy was to bring in a business partner to allow for greater expansion of the company. The freewheeling days of the 1990s were shortly to move into a new phase.



>> ALL ABOUT BERLITZ

Apa Publishing acquired the licence for Berlitz Publishing in 2002, bringing the travel and language books by the storied brand into the Apa fold.

In language-learning, Berlitz is a hallowed name. Founded in 1878 as a method and a school by Maximillian Delphinus Berlitz, a German emigrant to the US, the business has been a player on the global stage since the early 20th century, making it one of the world's first multinational firms. One of the most extraordinary things about Herr Berlitz's success is how he went from developing his product to proceeding to create a range of teaching materials to support it, and an organisation to deliver it.

A HISTORY OF THE BERLITZ BOOKS

Since no instructional materials were available to use with his new method, Berlitz created a line of textbooks covering all the major languages to use in his classrooms. The first publishing arm of Berlitz & Co. expanded into an agreement with a German publishing company as early as 1889. But it wasn't until the late 1940s that the move was made into publishing trade titles for language self-study and reference, and the Berlitz Phrase Books first appeared in the 1950s, complete with rich illustration and local cultural insights. The impact these books had on the language reference market has never waned, and even today, the phrase books are a symbol of the company and often, the entry point for new customers of the brand. Courses for self-study – replete with audio materials on successively: records, cassettes, CDs and MP3 – were also introduced.

Following a change of ownership in 1970, a new office for Berlitz was established in Lausanne, Switzerland. From here, the company Editions Berlitz created its own line of pocket-sized travel guides, the first of their kind. The books were ideal companions for the worldwide travel boom that was emerging in the 1970s as air travel opened up to a wider market. In particular, the Berlitz Travel Guides, as they were then known, were ideal snapshots for business travellers, of whom there were increasing numbers. With a dazzling range of travel destinations – around 130 in print today – on the list and easy-to-find information, the series was a revolutionary hit, and popular with licensees, who snapped the rights to the series up to publish in languages from French and Korean to Finnish and Turkish.



It was also during this time, while the company was based in Lausanne, that the first edition of the *Berlitz Complete Handbook to Cruising* was devised. Written by cruise expert Douglas Ward and published in 1985, the book was to become the unparalleled “Bible” for cruise enthusiasts over the next 35 years. It is still updated annually (see page 26 for more on the cruise guide).

APA TAKES OVER

The company continued to launch new language products and the publishing arm was moved to Oxford, UK, in 1991, now known as the Berlitz Publishing Company, until Apa took over in 2002. Jeremy Westwood, Managing Director of Apa Publications from 1997 until 2008, recalls, “To start with, it was the language publishing that we were concerned with, and the work was done in Munich under the management of Vince Docherty, but we also appointed an editor in Singapore, to produce titles for the Asian market or using Asian languages. However, we also took on the Berlitz Pocket Guides and modernised and updated them and changed the covers. They were a joy to our distributors and had great success.”

Tony Gulliver's experience working on the small Insight Guides series put him in the frame to run the Berlitz Pocket Guides. “The strategy was to get as many titles out as possible in the new livery and design, where necessary with new or part new photography. But some of the photography in the existing guides was excellent. We later added new features such as a Top Ten Attractions, and then later, A Perfect Day. [Their popularity is likely because] we retained the narrative text, so you could enjoy reading in the pocket guide format and also, a good, simple design.” Tony notes that the books' sales were strong even as the general travel market began to suffer in the late 2010s, with a high point being when Berlitz were the top-selling pocket guide travel series in the UK, around 2008.



BERLITZ TODAY

Today, Apa Publications continues to develop and publish Berlitz Pocket Guides to a huge range of destinations – several new ones were added to cover the cities hosting European Cup football matches in 2020. While no longer distributing language course materials, the travel guides, phrase books and of course, the all-important cruise guides remain cornerstones of the business.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

"The world was also at this time hurtling rapidly into dot.com, and travel guides for the TV generation... It was a challenge that was going to define the future of Insight Guides."

After 27 years as a relatively freewheeling, independent-minded operation, change was coming for Apa Productions. The advent of new challenges, a changing market and global events were to impact on the company and dramatically affect its security. But for the first years of the 21st century, the golden years of travel publishing kept on rolling, with new backing and new deals.

THE BEGINNING OF THE LANGENSCHIEDT ERA

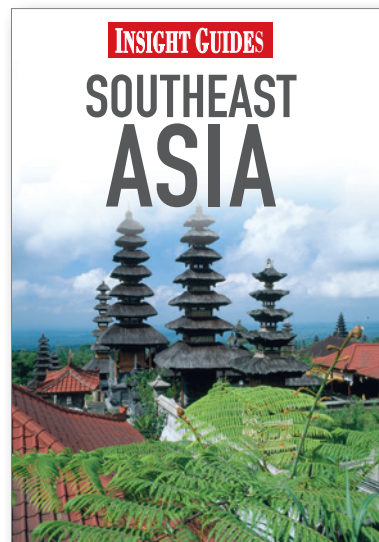
By 1997, Apa Productions was optimistic about the future, but in order to expand further, it needed investment. The company had expanded rapidly and funds were needed to employ more staff and keep the printing presses running. Hans Hoefer, Apa's founder, sought a partner and decided to sell 50 percent of the business to Langenscheidt, a large but independent German publisher with whom he had a good relationship. Although the intent was to retain involvement with Apa, in the end, Hans' continuing working practices weren't compatible with the incoming corporate management, and he sold the whole



business to Langenscheidt, heralding the start of a new chapter for the company, now named Apa Publications GmbH & Co Verlag (S) Branch.

Former employees remember this time as a period of shifting to a more formalised structure, with more meetings and a stricter hierarchy, but also greater benefits and a firmer footing for employees. Jeremy Westwood, formerly of HarperCollins Cartographic, was brought in to be Managing Director, and is credited by staff with making these positive changes. Dorothy Stannard, Executive Editor in the London office, remembers: "we adjusted, and the company retained a family feel, even after we moved to yet bigger offices in London Bridge. We also benefited from new initiatives such as pensions and health insurance, which we appreciated. And we'd still play Miles Davis after 7pm. Crucially, we also benefited from new investment, leading to several new series and a major relaunch for the big Insight series, which had become tired by this time. It was an exciting period."





Jeremy recalls, “The office I joined in Waterloo was very small and under-resourced. The team, led by Brian Bell, was dedicated but the books were looking a bit tired both inside and out. My brief was to modernise.” At this time, Insight Guides’ distinctive covers featured close-up portraits of “local” faces and this was causing a series of problems, notably when the picture agencies that the photos were obtained from had not obtained the rights to reproduce images of the subjects’ faces! Jeremy remembers several lawsuits that had to be settled, so the decision was taken to change the cover design. Siu Li Teo, General Manager in Singapore, also noted that “With the start of a new millenium, Langenscheidt wanted to move away from the famous ‘faces’ cover design that was synonymous with Insight Guides, for something fresh. Not only did we have to change the

cover design, we had to also change the way the content was structured as well. We had Brian working his magic on this to make it appealing to the next generation of readers but yet follow Hans’ original concept, and Klaus Geisler to do the bulk of redesigning the covers, moving away from the faces but yet retain enough of the Insight Guide features to make it recognisable.”

In addition to the changes to the books, Jeremy also instituted changes to the office: “In London, the inadequacy of the [existing] building became quickly apparent and we found a building in Borough High Street which became a happy home for an expanded company. We recruited well and did I think achieve a high level of happiness and satisfaction among the staff. This feeling was helped by the fact that we were responding to the opportunities of a strong travel market.”

NEW SERIES AND LAUNCHES

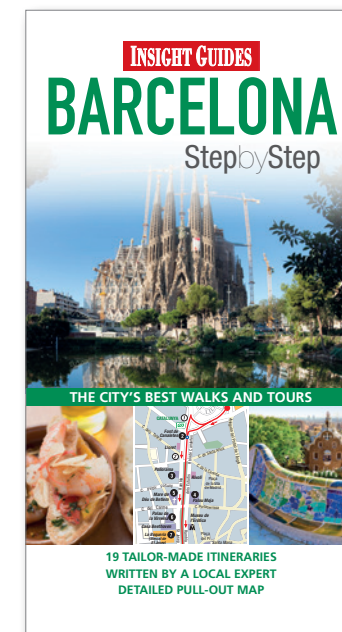
The valuable investment provided by Langenscheidt allowed Apa to embark on an ambitious expansion programme, growing its lists and relaunching the original series with a new design and more modern covers. With the market for travel guidebooks continuing to grow, Apa Publications acquired the license to publish Berlitz Pocket Guides and Berlitz language publications – as well as the successful *Berlitz Complete Guide to Cruising and Cruise Ships* – from the famous language educator (see page 20). The golden years of travel publishing kept on rolling.

The first decade of the 21st century saw forays into many different sorts of travel guides, some for specific markets, and at all different price points. Jeremy remains proud of these deals: “In Asia, we sold many thousands of copies of *Asia’s Best Hotels* a bestseller for several years in succession. And an absolute highlight for me was the sale, in Singapore, of a special guide book to the three cities of London, Singapore and Sydney, to commemorate the first flight of the A380 Airbus in Singapore livery to those three destinations. Copies of this book were given to passengers on the inaugural flights.” Further special series were launched to detail museums, shops and restaurants in major cities. In 2008, the Insight Pocket Guides were relaunched as the Insight Guides Step-by-Step series, with an attractive, modern design, while Insight Smart Guides and Insight Guides Great Breaks were developed from the tired-looking Insight Compact Guides.

Other launches were perhaps less successful. For a time, Apa oversaw the Michelin Green Guides series and housed a small editorial team in the London office, but these proved to be a challenging sell in most markets. A marketing tie-up between Insight Guides and the Discovery Channel sadly didn’t yield the expected benefits, but other areas bloomed. Jeremy and Insight’s Rights Director achieved a great deal of success in exporting the books to further markets. “In 2006, Susan Ferguson and I did the largest rights deal in Apa’s history, in Poland, where hardcover editions of the Insight Guides were sold in large quantities, earning us great royalties”, reports Jeremy. In the next decade, the link with Poland would prove to be even more fruitful.

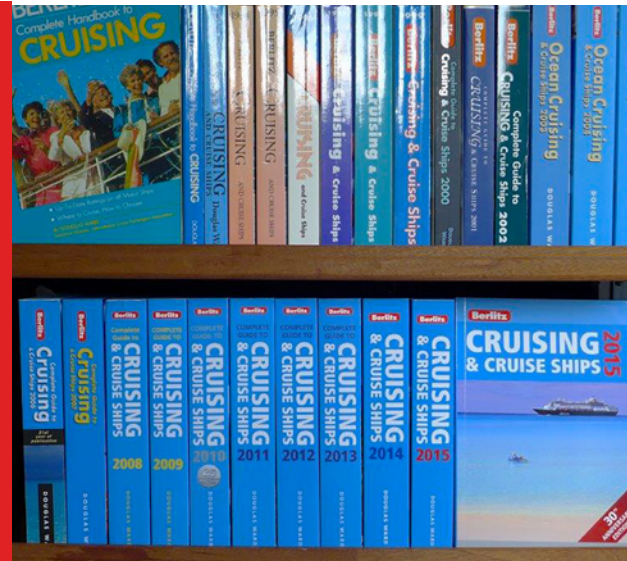
CHANGING TIMES

Langenscheidt’s brief to Jeremy was to visit the Singapore office – still home to Apa’s printing presses and an editorial and sales team – frequently, something that was no hardship. “[What was] so special about Singapore”, he says, “was the work environment, the staff and the location as an Asian hub, both for Asian markets and to our offices in Thailand, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, as well as our Australian and New Zealand markets. The port of Singapore provided



ALL ABOUT THE CRUISE GUIDE

In 1985, former cruise ship director turned Director of the International Cruise Passengers Association, Douglas Ward, was persuaded to turn his cruise ships ratings report (created solely for his association members) into a full-length guide for the consumer market by Marshall Mascott, then Managing Director of Berlitz Publications in Lausanne, Switzerland. The first edition of the book, entitled the *Berlitz Complete Handbook to Cruising*, ran to 250 pages and was written on a typewriter. The book became part of the Apa stable with Berlitz's acquisition in 2002. Over the past 35 years, this incomparable and exhaustive look at the world's ocean-going cruise ships and everything you need to know about the cruise experience has become a stand-alone phenomenon, frequently Apa's best-selling title, and has been updated almost every year by Douglas, who is recognised as a world-leading expert in cruising. The 2020 edition – now entitled *Cruising and Cruise Ships* – runs to 760 pages and remains a cornerstone of the Apa list, even spawning a little-sister river cruise guide.



excellent shipping possibilities to our major markets around the world.” But despite the enthusiasm of the MD, the business model and benefits of owning the means of production, as envisaged by Hans, was beginning to show signs of wear.

Throughout previous years, Apa's ability to print its own books had been its secret weapon. As Dorothy says, “Having our own printers had been a real luxury, allowing us great flexibility. We also worked very closely with the production department in Singapore, with twice-weekly couriers taking proofs and files back and forth.” However, Siu Li recalls, “As the presses were getting older, and with technology in print advancing in leaps and bounds in the

early 2000s, this vision of printing our own books became more of a burden, as we were no longer as agile as the printers emerging in China who were buying into CTP (computer to press). Our four-colour machines were in dire need of replacement and financing such an investment was too costly. Consumers' taste was also changing. Square-back binding became a thing of the past and everyone wanted round-back binding, with the emergence of Dorling Kindersley's Eyewitness travel guides.

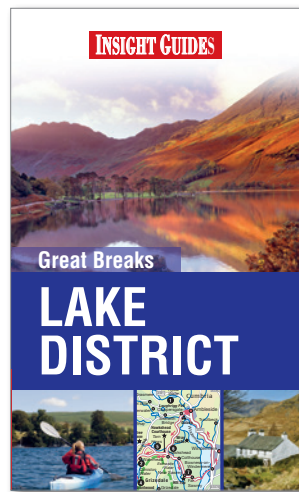
New printing technology, print on demand, computer to plate, computer to press was all encroaching into our factory domain as well. Our advantage in the string of pearls concept was fast becoming a heavy weight. Consideration had to be made as to whether having printing presses was relevant anymore. Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end. Storing excess stock was also a big issue as consumers expected more frequent updates, which then meant we'd have more outdated stock and had to expect more returns.”

Jeremy echoes this sense of challenges mounting up: “Towards the end of my time, there were more low points, with the increasing cash shortages, the lack of investment in Singapore, and the very poor performance of our distributors in the US market [Langenscheidt New York] where we failed to provide any real competition to DK or the US giants like Fodor's. We also began to face the challenge of digital guides, and we did not have the resources to fund the digitisation of our material.”

THE CHALLENGE OF THE INTERNET ERA

Indeed, competition for space in the booming travel market was now fierce. But the biggest shift was just beginning to become apparent: the rise of the internet. Siu Li notes that in the early 21st century, “the world was hurtling rapidly into dot.com, and travel guides for the TV generation. This was the world that Hans had talked about years earlier. It was on our doorstep now and was a challenge that was going to define the future of Insight Guides, but it was one that unfortunately, Apa and Langenscheidt were still not ready for.” Insight Guides' ailing website was rebuilt, but the clamour of the challenge became louder and louder: how to continue to sell travel expertise to customers when there was so much information available for free online?

The impact of online information becoming ever-more prolific and easily available (as tablets and smartphones entered the marketplace) was a blow to the curated – and long-gestating –



form of travel guidebook publishing. Many travellers, especially younger ones, didn't see why they would buy a book when information was so readily available – and possibly more up-to-date – online. And in the late 2000s, this transformative shift coincided with another major shock: the world financial crisis that began in 2008 and whose lingering effects have fingerprints all over all subsequent global developments.

Jeremy and Brian both retired from managing Apa and its books in 2008, and Langenscheidt recruited a young MD with experience at the world's biggest travel publisher, Lonely Planet. Katharine Leck inherited a tall order at a particularly challenging time: to tackle the modernisation (yet again) of a storied company, in order to compete in a suddenly hostile environment.

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Over the next few years, changes came thick and fast. The eventual decision to shutter Apa's printing presses and outsource printing to Chinese companies at the close of the 2000s was the end of an era, one that all involved at the time point to as a momentous change in the business's history. The Singapore editorial office also closed, with all publishing work now undertaken at the London office. The publishing team in London was reorganised; long-standing team members departed, including Dorothy, while a young cohort of editors stepped up. New operational roles were created, with the relocation of many business functions to London from Singapore.

Sarah Clark, now Head of Publishing at Apa, started at the company in 2007 as Editorial Assistant and progressed in the editorial team through these years. "We knew there were challenges in the market, with our distributors, with systems that felt desperately in need of modernisation to the younger staff, but there were good years as we launched dozens of new titles and there were opportunities for taking ownership of new series or other innovations, if you were ambitious." Indeed, between 2009 and 2010, Apa launched three new lists: Insight Guides Select, an upmarket, experience-led guidebook series, the Insight Guides Great Breaks, which were developed from the old British regional Compact Guides, but with an increasingly environmentally-friendly, staycation-inspired focus, and the Berlitz Handbooks.

In addition, the processes for creating the books – honed in a slower time – were overhauled to save time and money, culminating in the wholesale adoption of new technology: the introduction of Typefi, an automated layout programme that enables efficient content output as eBooks as well as for print, was a radical new direction in 2011. The relaunch of insightguides.com at the same time provided a more confident shop front in the all-important online space, with comprehensive destination information and a house blog. Times had changed.

However, times were also tough. Despite the efforts at rejuvenation and refining of the Insight and Berlitz products on offer, the ongoing global financial downturn and impact of the internet had plunged the travel publishing market into a crisis, with several other small publishers ceasing operations altogether. Langenscheidt itself was having a hard time and the need for cash and savings from Apa resulted in a painful period of final cuts in 2012, with the company restructured and shrunk, and the London office at Borough High Street sold. "For a year, we operated from a ghost office", says Sarah. "It was an odd, intermediary year, in hindsight – we had streamlined the list to make it more profitable and were launching a new series (Insight Guides Explore, to replace the Step-by-Step list) – but we were in limbo, as we knew at this point that Langenscheidt wanted to sell us".

What the staff didn't know was that things had become so challenging, the Langenscheidt family was prepared to shut down the business, or take the best offer on the table. Apa Publications' future hung in the balance. As the small team moved to a new office in London Bridge, with unpacking still underway, a deal was struck, placing the company in new hands.

MY FAVOURITE DESTINATION

Away from Berlitz, my personal favourite destination remains Pakistan, which I wrote the first edition of the Insight Guide to. I think it stayed in print until about 2010, astonishing when you think that hardly anyone ever went there [a new edition is due out in 2020]. But I kept going out to keep it up-to-date, particularly between 1999 and 2008. A former ambassador told me that he used the book regularly to introduce foreign secretaries and prime ministers to Pakistan. So Pakistan has enormous meaning for me as it was the book that launched my publishing career with Apa.

Tony Gulliver

A NEW AND DIGITAL ERA

"If we are modest and realistic, we must admit that looking at where Apa was in 2014 and where it is now in 2020, it is already a success."



Hans Hoefer and René Frey
at the InterContinental
Singapore, 2016

For several years, Apa had operated in tough conditions, battling troubles on multiple fronts, from the global financial downturn to the rise and rise of the internet, to internal cash struggles and complex corporate structures. Having shrunk the company in the preceding years, in early 2014, Langenscheidt decided to sell Apa Publications to the Swiss media entrepreneur, René Frey.

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

With a background in managing media businesses, René had worked with the Langenscheidt group at their Polish business, Langenscheidt Polska, from 2010, which was still a profitable concern at this point. Aware that Apa was for sale as early as 2011, René made enquiries, but came away unconvinced about the company's future and what could be done to turn its fortunes around. But by the time he heard that Apa was on the verge of ceasing operations altogether in 2013, he had an idea and a vision of how he could develop the business.

René's initial aims were to get the company back to profitability and do whatever was necessary to achieve this goal. But in addition to securing and growing the publishing programme, he wanted to capitalise on Insight Guides' reputation for quality and cultural insight with a brand-new concept: a digital travel platform where travellers could connect with local experts in a destination to design their perfect tailor-made, private trip. Reflecting on the opportunity he saw when purchasing Apa, René notes "brand awareness, reputation in the travel industry, high-quality content and relations with very loyal clients. I thought it would be easier to transform an existing business than start from scratch".

MY FAVOURITE DESTINATION

"First Warsaw. I have been accompanying the development of this city since 1991 and it is amazing what has happened. Nobody believed back then the city would be like it is today. I walked through empty streets in March 1991 and it was a shock coming from Switzerland – today, Warsaw is a vibrant, modern European capital.

I also have a liking for Singapore. It's quite the opposite to Warsaw as a city but its composition is exciting for me. I was born in Basel, a small city in Switzerland, so I am more of a city boy, so long as they are not too big.

But I have visited so many places in this world and I can honestly say this: it is beautiful almost everywhere if your mind is open."

René Frey



The London team
explores Warsaw, 2015

However, taking charge of the business was considerably more fraught than expected. The shell-shocked publishing team feared the end of producing print travel guides, while René was equally taken aback at the company's more traditional publishing processes, strict hierarchies and a welcome from the team that ranged from wary to hostile. "The first three or four months were very difficult. There was a culture clash with the people working with me, because I did not intend to change much in the way I had been running businesses for many years." Central to René's mindset was that Apa was effectively now a start-up, building a new business, which clashed with the mentality of an historic publishing house. The small team began to shrink yet further.

REBUILDING AND MOVING FORWARD

In summer 2014, however, things began to settle down. René appointed Agnieszka Mizak, formerly a leading editor at Langenscheidt Polska, to take charge of the publishing team. Today, he says, "hiring Agnieszka is the single best business decision I made, and she has paid back my trust immeasurably. She impressed me right away [at Langenscheidt Polska] and was ready to pick the fight there; she still does at Apa every day. Since the very first moment of her work for Apa she has made a difference."

Agnieszka recalls, "I knew the publishing business very well but I didn't know the British market or mentality, so to find my way and settle down in a really different environment was quite difficult at the beginning. I think my Polish sense of humour also caused a lot of confusion among our London team! We all needed time to get used to and to understand each other. But what convinced me to stay was the positive attitude of the publishing team to all the changes we wanted to make. It looked like everybody who was there wanted to make this company work again."

Agnieszka made an impact immediately, with ideas for more efficient processes and new ways of organising the publishing schedule. On a personal level, as Sarah Clark – one of the remaining editors at the time – says, "Agnieszka's calm and competence brought some direction and stability back to the team after a long period of uncertainty. When the dust had settled, those of us who remained were open to advancing the business and supporting the new direction it was taking". The smaller, more agile team – now with new additions – gradually fused the heritage knowledge of the business with the new initiatives brought by the change in management.

One of the new facets of the business was the establishment of an office in Warsaw, Poland, where new members of staff supported the publishing function in London but also set to work on developing Insight Guide's travel marketplace platform. Meanwhile, Insight Guides as a brand was being brought up to date, with a new logo for a new era. René was determined to seize a space not yet maximised by other travel publishers – the digital arena. So Insight Guides also set about repositioning itself as a guidebook publisher for the digital age. Its new, forward-looking strategy included offering free eBook downloads alongside print book purchases and the development of the Walking Eye app, allowing access to Insight Guides content on the go from smartphones or tablets. By offering customers access to their content on a range of



René and his wife,
Alicja, in Bali



Apa's 2015 Christmas party in Warsaw

platforms and embracing the needs of readers who didn't want to carry a physical book with them on their travels, the company made a bold statement about its ambitions for the future. In addition, the decision to offer free eBooks was audacious in a market that had so far resisted this model, but René, not feeling constrained by the standard practices of British publishing companies, saw an opportunity in being the first to try the idea.

Alongside this, a complete rethink of all business practices and an ambitious publishing programme, that opted for growth over slimming down the list, resulted in Apa returning to stability and profit much sooner than expected, a result Agnieszka notes as a real triumph for what had looked like a failing company: "the first month when we brought the company back to profitability was a major high point, especially when it seemed to be a mission impossible at the beginning".

And in 2015, insightguides.com was relaunched as a travel marketplace, offering hundreds of trip itineraries and the ability to book unique travel experiences easily and directly. In the process, a new chapter in Apa's history was begun.

LAUNCHING THE NEW BUSINESS

Insight Guides was no longer simply a travel guidebook publisher, telling you about where to go: it was now in the business of actually taking you there. The model that René had envisaged

was a marketplace where travellers would be connected with destination management companies (DMCs) on the ground, enabling them to plan customised trips with local experts, including experiences and accommodation. Building the new website on top of the existing insightguides.com meant that the destination information, travel blog features and bookshop was connected to the new business, providing a one-stop shop for a traveller's needs: inspiration and action.

Since its launch, the online business has steadily grown, with greater turnover every year. But it hasn't been an easy ride, steering a start-up alongside a long-established, traditional business. "It was and is a struggle to balance the needs of both businesses," says René. "The major challenge has been hiring the right people for the online business – and it is all about people. We have made good progress on that compared to 2015 and we are on a much better path than ever before. I am more convinced than ever that we are doing the right thing strategically as a business – however, I would not recommend to anybody to follow me in taking this kind of journey alone! However, it is my business. I am not reporting to another guy sitting somewhere and trying to explain what we do and why".

By the second half of the 2010s, Apa was established in its new normal. The majority of the online business operated from the Warsaw office and the publishing team remained in London, with a smaller office in Singapore once again, to maximise the Asian travel customer market. The two parts of the business had settled into something symbiotic, but separate, one complementing the other. Insight Guides' internal design and covers were relaunched with a new style and the new logo, to modernise the look and presence of the books in conjunction with its digital add-ons option. Even the *Berlitz Cruising and Cruise Ships* guide got a facelift in time for its 30th anniversary. In 2016, the Insight Guides Pocket series was launched, initially for the US market, and the Insight Guides Select range was rebranded as Insight Guides Experience, with new destinations added. The long-standing Insight Guides Fleximap range was completely redesigned and new language products were added. Graphically, the whole list was fresher and ready to compete in the tentatively-recovering travel guides market.

But although things were looking increasingly settled, the big game-changer for Apa Publications was still ahead – its most audacious move yet.



TAKING OVER ROUGH GUIDES

In 2017, René became aware that the much-loved travel publisher, Rough Guides, was for sale. Owned by Penguin Random House since 2002 (see page 40), sales had been falling and against a background of high origination costs and old-school practices, the publishing giant was prepared to sell, or wind the brand down. But René sensed an opportunity. “It looked like a copy-paste exercise [of the process of modernising Insight Guides] and in fact, it was. We knew very well what we wanted to do and what needed to be done to keep Rough Guides in the market and it looked like a promising opportunity to take over a very reputable and widely known business.”

With only a small Apa team in the loop to parse the pre-sale information (one person representing each department of the company), the deal progressed. “We couldn’t believe it”, says Sarah. “It seemed extraordinary that a small, only recently

rescued company like ours could be looking to take over one of the biggest brand names in travel.” But the same challenges that had affected Insight Guides – the rise of online publishing, the effects of the global financial crisis, surging production costs – were buffeting Rough Guides, despite the shelter of PRH’s profitable business. Only a few months after beginning negotiations, René and Agnieszka startled both the Insight Guides and Rough Guides teams with the announcement that the latter would soon become part of the Apa family.

It was a moment of triumph for a once-struggling small company, that now presided over three major travel brands, although for both sides, it was a deeply daunting prospect, how to integrate the businesses. Agnieszka recalls, “The Rough Guides acquisition and integration was like a Lilliputian swallowed a giant – it was an unbelievably complex process to steer by a small team of people, to figure out how two very different worlds and ways of working can meet, change together and finally work smoothly like one organism. The amount of changes, including to

the team, processes, workflows and human habits, undertaken during just 12 months cannot be unappreciated. It was the biggest challenge we had faced – but one I am very proud of – and we did it.”

In many ways, the acquisition of Rough Guides revealed just how far Apa had come in the past decade, in its modernisation and streamlining of processes. Two years down the line, Sarah reflects that, “adding Rough Guides to the Apa portfolio has had two-way benefits. Apa has been able to shake up and dramatically simplify the Rough Guides creation process, which in turn enables us to publish more books, faster. But Rough Guides has also opened up opportunities for Insight Guides and Apa as a whole, by providing more avenues for innovative products, author sharing and tailored special deals”. Indeed, synonymous with practical travel tips, adventurous travellers and a “tell it like it is” ethos, Rough Guides’ well-known brand perfectly complements Insight Guides’ highly-visual, cultural focus. Today, the whole Apa team works across all brands, making for a varied programme and lots more opportunity to create and sell.

These range from the publishing of various special projects with partners on subjects as disparate as the Liberation Route Europe and travelling the North Coast 500 in Scotland, to the launch of inspirational travel-themed books – some in coffee table format, some as continuations of Rough Guides products such as *Make the Most of Your Time on Earth* and some entirely new, such as *100 Best Places on Earth* – and to the most contemporary form of curating information: the podcast. The successful and high-quality *Rough Guide to Everywhere* podcast already had a couple of series under its belt when Apa acquired the company, and in 2020, it heads into its fifth year, still telling the unexpected and quirky travel stories it has become known for and hosted by Rough Guides editor, Aimee White. Meanwhile, in 2019, Apa also launched *Insight Guides: the Travel Podcast*, hosted by Insight editor, Zara Sekhavati, to focus on fascinating historical or cultural travel stories.



The sales team at Frankfurt Book Fair, 2019

Meanwhile, with Rough Guides firmly part of the Apa family, it is benefiting from the digital innovations established by Insight Guides – and in 2018, roughguides.com also expanded into offering tailor-made trips, offering personalised travel to worldwide destinations for independent-minded travellers. The perfect collaboration between the books’ ethos and the flexibility and expertise offered by local experts on the ground in the destinations, roughguides.com is expanding its offering all the time, steered by an international team of developers, editors and marketers.

A GLOBAL TEAM

As Apa Publications celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2020, it’s a more busy organisation than ever. From the skeleton team of 2014, the company’s new London office in Bermondsey is a bustling full house comprising publishing, sales, marketing, online and finance departments. Of all the achievements that the company has made in the last six years, Agnieszka says, “what makes me proudest is probably our current team – we are just a mixture of different nationalities, mentalities and characters who have found the best way to work together, to

support each other, to go through everything together, even what seems to be impossible. We are the small team that can move mountains!” It is befitting a travel company that the team is more international than ever, with staff based around the world from New York to Bali via London, Warsaw, Madrid and Hong Kong. In the London office alone, nationalities from Polish and French to Thai and Ecuadorian are represented.

“I had never worked in the UK before, nor with British people”, says René, “and it did take me some time to accept the differences in cultures between my upfront style and the British way of doing business. Today, I think we have a good mix in the company”.

As for the benefits of being a multi-brand company, René notes “leverage in trade, synergies in commissioning,

sales and production. Publishing is a market still up for consolidation and we have to aim to be at the top of the food chain if we want to be relevant. So we are constantly looking at how we can improve processes and increase efficiency, as well as looking out for opportunities in the market”. Having learned the lessons of the past, Apa never stands still, always keeping one eye on its processes and another out new trends. Today, though, René acknowledges the achievement of Apa being what it is today. “If we are modest and realistic, we must admit that looking at where Apa was in 2014 and now where it is in 2020, it is already a success. The company was done, but today we are an important player in the market. We are the only guidebook publisher in the UK with several brands, and we are number three in the market. This is a success and I do appreciate that more than ever, but not a triumph yet. There are further heights to scale.”

Dorothy Stannard, Insight’s Executive Editor in the 1990s and 2000s, makes the observation that, “in some ways the company has come full circle, losing the more lumbering aspects that a growing company inevitably acquires, and regaining the nimble entrepreneurial spirit that first shaped it. I am impressed that the company appears to have found a way forward, defying the downward spiral that has led other travel guide companies to shrink or close.”

Meanwhile, since selling Apa in 1997, Hans Hoefer has been busy with his photography, gallery and guest house in southern Sri Lanka – the aptly named Apa Villa. But his innovative, can-do spirit is reflected in the business that exists today. As the company he founded fifty years ago marks its anniversary, he says simply, “it feels good”.

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

As mentioned previously, the origin of Apa’s name always intrigues. But it can mean whatever you want it to, as these suggestions from the staff suggest:

- A Publishing Achievement
- Acknowledging Publishing Aspirations
- Amazing Publishing Adventure
- Anarchic Party Animals
- Awesome Proper Authors
- A Phenomenal Anniversary
- All Properly Awesome
- A Podcast Adventure
- A Planet Awaits!



>> ALL ABOUT ROUGH GUIDES

Apa's acquisition of Rough Guides felt like a bold move, but it was also symbiotic, as this storied British publisher has also been breaking ground ever since its launch.

Mark Ellingham, founder of Rough Guides, describes what makes them special: "an independent, contemporary-minded approach; a respect for and genuine interest in local cultures in the broadest sense; and a pride in accurate research and high-quality writing". Known for its "tell it like it is" ethos, Rough Guides has a loyal readership and a strong brand identity, yet like Insight Guides, it has experienced the ebb and flow of a challenging market.

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO ROUGH GUIDES

As with Insight Guides, Rough Guides came about through the founder's sense of a gap in the market. Mark Ellingham conceived and wrote the first Rough Guide – to Greece – in 1981, to be, as he recalls, "a well written guidebook that combined strong cultural and historical coverage, a contemporary journalistic approach to a country and low-budget practical information. At the time, there was little on the market. Lonely Planet were limited to a handful of Asian destinations and Insight, too, were publishing only Asian titles at this point. The main guidebooks for Europe were the American Frommers and Fodor's".

Rough Guide Greece was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul in 1982 and sold well. Mark became Series Editor and began commissioning further titles, before, in the mid-1980s, he and three fellow editors – John Fisher, Martin Dunford and Jack Holland – bought the titles from Routledge and set up as independent publishers, distributed first

by Harrap Columbus and then by Penguin. By the early 1990s, they had around 100 travel titles in print. The brand then expanded to cover cultural subjects – the first of which was World Music, which led to the creation of Rough Guide compilation CDs (a series of 200 titles compiled by World Music Network).

Mark recalls, "the Rough Guide reference series, in pre-Wikipedia days, grew to encompass around 60 guides, on subjects ranging from Pregnancy to Shakespeare to Climate Change. We struck lucky with a pioneering guide to the Internet, when it was just taking off, which sold more than four million copies".

Rough Guides founders (from left) Martin Dunford, Susanne Hillen, Mark Ellingham and John Fisher

EARLY DIGITAL STEPS

In 1995, Rough Guides were selling around a million books a year. In addition to their spin-off reference series and music guides, the company had also helped to develop a BBC TV series, *Rough Guide*, which ran for nearly a decade, and had established a pioneering website with *Wired*, which was the first to publish guidebooks in their entirety. As Mark notes ruefully, "this was a little ahead of its time (hotels didn't yet have websites – even in San Francisco!)".

Having worked with Penguin as the brand's distributors, the decision was made to sell Rough Guides to them to allow expansion of the brand with the financial backing of the publishing behemoth. Penguin initially bought half the company's shares in 1995 (benefiting employees and authors in a share scheme) and the rest in 2002, at which point the team moved into Penguin's offices on London's Strand. Rough Guides were integrated into Penguin's travel division along with Dorling Kindersley. Mark left Penguin in 2007, following a celebration of 25 years of Rough Guides, and set up an environment list for Profile Books, having recently published what remains a pertinent *Rough Guide to Climate Change*.

Rough Guides benefited from the financial and organisational muscle of Penguin, but the same challenges that buffeted Insight Guides from the late 2010s onwards were causing problems. Despite the founders' attempts to get ahead of the curve with online publishing and engagement, Rough Guides still suffered from the increasing proliferation of free online content, as well as a lack of consumer confidence. In addition, the company had retained its traditional publishing processes. The books were as high-quality as ever, but in a declining market, they were expensive and slow to produce. Penguin Random House decided to sell the company – and in November 2017, it was purchased by René Frey to be a part of Apa Publications.

A NEW ERA FOR ROUGH GUIDES

Two years into Apa's ownership of Rough Guides, the brand has become an integral part of the business, complementing Insight Guides and Berlitz. Its books have been fully integrated into Apa's processes, several new titles are in the works and the website, roughguides.com, is being fully upgraded to support the new tailor-made trips aspect of the business. Reflecting on what a travel brand needs in today's market, Mark comments that, "Rough Guides' core values are a good basis, but the books and online offerings need to maintain a relevant attitude and information." Indeed, the mantra of "fly less, stay longer" has never felt more important than in today's (literal) climate. "Print books have surprised us all with their durability", Mark says, "so I hope Rough Guides continue as books for some years to come. I would love to see Apa make a success of Rough Guides online. I would like to see Rough Guides information as ubiquitous and trusted as Google's mapping!"

Mark and John with Sarah Clark in 2019

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"People that travel and are keen to explore new things are open to the progress of humanity. If we are afraid of everything strange, we as a species would not be where we are today: in a place that, despite lots of problems globally, has never been better." - René Frey

In 2020, Apa Publications is celebrating fifty years in business. But where do they go from here? Today, it is home to three major travel brands, with guidebook series ranging from the large-format Insight Guides and Rough Guides, and inspirational coffee-table books, to the smaller Explores, Great Breaks, Insight and Berlitz Pockets and Pocket Rough Guides, not to mention the Berlitz cruise guides and language products under all three brands, and the travel marketplace businesses at [insightguides.com](https://www.insightguides.com) and [roughguides.com](https://www.roughguides.com). But this is not a company that ever stands still. To mark this big anniversary, Apa is launching its responsible travel initiative: a 360-degree drive to formalise the brands' commitment to sustainable, responsible travel and the support of women globally, in all aspects of the business.

WHERE NOW FOR TRAVEL?

With increasing concern for the environmental impact of travel and ongoing political turmoil globally, many ask what the future is for the travel market. But René sees positive growth despite the challenges: "It is a genetic thing that people want to travel, and explore new places and experiences. It has driven humanity for centuries and will do so more in the future. I do encourage my family to go and see new things, as it has changed me greatly. When I was young, I grew up in a simple world and travelling was the single best thing in my life to open up my mind. It is important for our species to grow humanity, prosperity and



RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

To mark Apa's 50th anniversary in 2020, the company is launching its new initiative to promote responsible travel and the empowerment of women globally, the latter in recognition of the crucial role that women play in their communities, and thus in the advancement of a destination more widely. Apa's initiative will be based on three pillars: environment, economy and socio-cultural aspects. Acknowledging that the concept of cultural exchange has always been central to Insight Guides' philosophy and environmentally-conscious travel to Rough Guides', the company feels that it is now time to formalise its ethos through a series of actions, which will encompass the book publishing and tailor-made trips parts of the business, as well as general company practices, from decisions about paper sourcing to fundraising efforts on a regular basis.

The key aims are:

- To provide information about responsible travel and womens' rights to our community through our print and online platforms, to encourage our readers to make informed decisions about their travel choices.
- To create awareness of local initiatives and businesses that embody these aims.
- To support, along with our wider community of destination experts, jointly selected projects that promote sustainable travel and women's rights around the world.

peace. Getting to know strange things or cultures allows us to learn that in fact they are not strange – just different. Now, of course, we are facing the problem that the resources on our planet are not endless and that every trip causes damage to nature. Apa sees this responsibility and that is why we are setting up our programme to raise awareness of responsible travel, and as a business, we will invest more in being sustainable.

"I would not pledge to prohibit or impede travel because it will be impossible: it is absolutely against human nature. But we must learn to travel more sustainably and we must make progress in our carbon output. That problem needs a solution and I have no doubt that humans can find one."



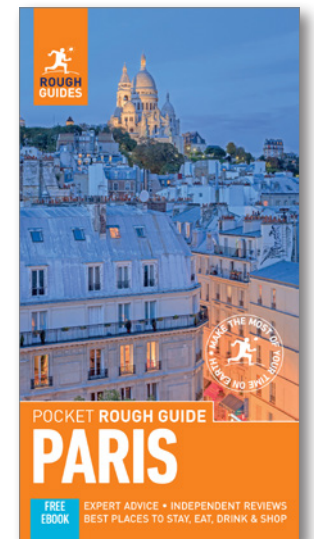
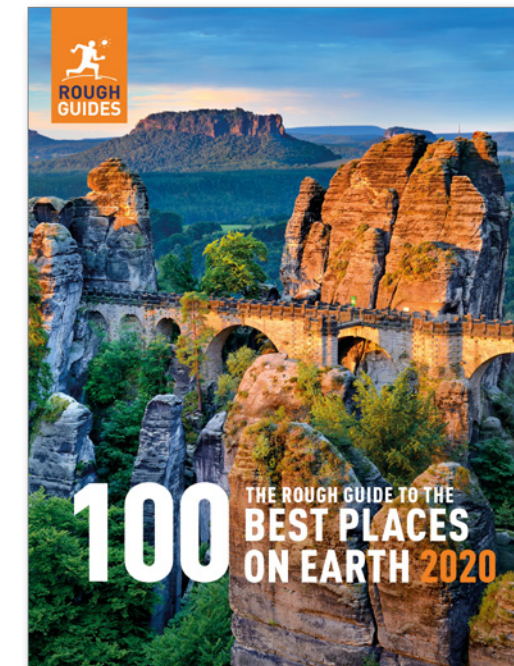
INTO THE 2020S – AND BEYOND

Reflecting on his wishes for Apa Publications in the future, René says, “I hope that the innovative digital developments we have made since 2015 will secure the future of the company and the 60+ jobs for another 50 years, at least. The future will be challenging, and we have to accept that flexibility is key to survival. Remember Darwin: it is not the biggest and most threatening species that survive, it is the one that is able to adapt to new situations quicker than others”. Indeed, surveying the history of the company in its 50 years to date, its great achievement has been to innovate and radically update its model when needed, without compromising the initial mission statement of the business from its earliest days in Bali: to promote cultural understanding and exchange.

And this adaptability shows no signs of waning yet. As Apa celebrates its 50th anniversary, there are further exciting developments in the pipeline to kick-start the second half of its century: a major cooperation for the next phase of the online business and new progressions for the publishing business. The launch of these new innovations is set to propel Apa’s reach in the travel sector even further.

And ultimately, this is an extraordinary company. Despite the inevitable ups and downs of working for any given organisation, all of the former Apa staffers who shared their memories spoke of their time at Apa as something special, of experiencing many good times and passion projects in a uniquely convivial environment. As Jeremy Westwood, former MD of Apa, says: “I wish I were still involved, as my heart belongs to Apa!” The people as the beating heart of a company is the common thread that runs through everyone’s conclusions. A desire to create the best possible products and the will to help one another in the process. The enjoyment of the task at hand and of celebrating together when it’s done. Friendships and happy memories that live on, alongside the books that are the monuments to everyone’s efforts.

Today, Apa is once again a growing, internationally-staffed company pushing the boundaries of what is expected of a travel publisher and innovating to meet the needs of the traveller. From a one-man band in Bali to a diverse, enthusiastic staff of more than 60, Apa Publications is turning 50 at an incredible time in its history – but as this isn’t a company known for standing still, it will celebrate, and then it will be once again looking to the future.



YOUR TAILOR-MADE TRIP STARTS HERE

Tailor-made trips and unique adventures crafted by local experts

Rough Guides has been inspiring travellers with lively and thought-provoking guidebooks for more than 35 years. Now we're linking you up with selected local experts to craft your dream trip. They will put together your perfect itinerary and book it at local rates.

Don't follow the crowd – find your own path.

HOW ROUGHGUIDES.COM/TRIPS WORKS



STEP 1

Pick your dream destination, tell us what you want and submit an enquiry.



STEP 2

Fill in a short form to tell your local expert about your dream trip and preferences.



STEP 3

Our local expert will craft your tailor-made itinerary. You'll be able to tweak and refine it until you're completely satisfied.



STEP 4

Book online with ease, pack your bags and enjoy the trip! Our local expert will be on hand 24/7 while you're on the road.

BENEFITS OF PLANNING AND BOOKING AT ROUGHGUIDES.COM/TRIPS



PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH LOCAL EXPERTS

Rough Guides' English-speaking local experts are hand-picked, based on their experience in the travel industry and their impeccable standards of customer service.



SAVE TIME AND GET ACCESS TO LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

When a local expert plans your trip, you save time and money when you book, even during high season. You won't be charged for using a credit card either.



MAKE TRAVEL A BREEZE: BOOK WITH PIECE OF MIND

Enjoy stress-free travel when you use Rough Guides' secure online booking platform. All bookings come with a money-back guarantee.

WHAT DO OTHER TRAVELLERS THINK ABOUT ROUGH GUIDES TRIPS?



Trip to Spain

This Spain tour company did a fantastic job to make our dream trip perfect. We gave them our travel budget, told them where we would like to go, and they did all of the planning. Our drivers and tour guides were always on time and very knowledgeable. The hotel accommodations were better than we would have found on our own. Only one time did we end up in a location that we had not intended to be in. We called the 24 hour phone number, and they immediately fixed the situation.

Don A, USA



Trip to Morocco

Our trip was fantastic! Transportation, accommodations, guides - all were well chosen! The hotels were well situated, well appointed and had helpful, friendly staff. All of the guides we had were very knowledgeable, patient, and flexible with our varied interests in the different sites. We particularly enjoyed the side trip to Tangier! Well done! The itinerary you arranged for us allowed maximum coverage of the country with time in each city for seeing the important places.

Sharon, USA



PLAN AND BOOK YOUR TRIP AT
ROUGHGUIDES.COM/TRIPS



Thank you from Team Apa



Here's to the next 50 years!

