

Entrepreneur offers lessons in traveling and YouTube

Hawaii entrepreneurs come in all stripes. Dennis Callan (a former Honolulu Star-Bulletin travel columnist) is

a case in point. An inveterate wanderer, he has led more than 80 tours of Europe with Hawaii travelers since 1987 and documented them by shooting video. With 1,300 travel movies on YouTube, he's established a global presence with 52 million views and 138,000 subscribers. Callan is a textbook example of an entrepreneur who has leveraged the internet to catapult a successful travel industry career. I had the chance to visit his Makiki home office recently for this interview.



COURTESY PHOTO

Dennis Callan

Question: Tell us about your background.

Answer: I have been in Honolulu for 55 years, but my first eight years as a military dependent kept me moving to London and then around the mainland. After graduation from Brown with a degree in English literature, I moved to Hawaii and earned graduate degrees in anthropology and political science at the University of

Hawaii in the 1970s. Since then I built up the tour business and have been making travel videos and websites.

Q: How did you get started making videos?

TECH VIEW



ROB KAY

A: I have always been a photographer, and began shooting video in 1987 when small cameras became available. My first audience was on local public-access TV, even before 'Olelo, and I became the longest-running show there. But with YouTube my audience went worldwide in the millions.

Q: Did you have any training in this?

A: None of my formal education directly prepared me, so I learned on my own how to how to market my tours, which included writing for the Star-Bulletin and making videos. It was all self-taught. I continue to get helpful

feedback on video production from my wife and friends. While leading so many tours through Europe, I discovered where to go and how to see a place, so the videos are practical guides based on those experiences. There are the major destinations that must be seen, and the out-of-way places that are also beautiful and less crowded, so I focus on both in my videos.

Q: What kind of equipment is needed to make the videos?

A: Anyone can shoot videos with their phone and edit them on a laptop, but it is important to learn the basics of how to shoot. My editing gear is more elaborate because I do this all the time, so I have a MacPro, five monitors and nearly 100 hard drives filled with the videos.

Q: There are lots of travel videos on YouTube. How do you compete for an audience?

A: When I started on YouTube 17 years ago, there was not much competition, so I

got a head start, but now there are so many travel channels getting more viewers than me! The new trend is long, walking videos through a place with no narration, just pictures, but I don't subscribe to that. My videos are fully narrated by me, based on extensive research, to explain and describe what we are seeing. In that way I create a useful travel guide filled with entertaining visuals.

Q: What about a revenue stream? How does social media fit in?

A: YouTube has been supportive of creatives by sharing advertising revenues, and I am also on Amazon, Roku and a few other places, which has created an income stream that keeps me happy. However, it's not my main motivation. While competition has greatly increased since I first posted on YouTube, it's still possible for newcomers to make money. The key is creating excellent videos that find a large audience. You need to market so social media can

help build an audience. That said, making lots of money should not be the primary motivation. A personal passion is more relevant.

Q: Any new projects you're working on?

A: My new website, with videos, narration texts and pictures (www.townsofeurope.com) offers tips about where to go in nearly 200 towns around Europe. When I complete making a video, there is a great feeling of personal satisfaction that viewers find the movie helpful and fun.

Q: Any suggestions for those who want to make YouTube videos?

A: Just get started shooting; learn the basics of video editing! You'll need to provide narration based on your experience, and a good mic.

Rob Kay, a Honolulu-based writer, covers technology and sustainability for Tech View and is the creator of fiji.guide.com. He can be reached at Robertfredkay@gmail.com.

DENNIS CALLAN '67

The Grand Tour

Thinking about a trip to Europe? Here's some advice from a tour guide.

MANY PEOPLE LOVE TO TRAVEL. A CHOSEN FEW HAVE MADE a career out of it. One of those is Dennis Callan '67, who runs guided European trips through his Honolulu-based company, Tours by Train.

After graduation, Callan earned master's degrees in anthropology and political science, with further studies in urban and regional planning at the University of Hawaii. His YouTube videos on European travel have received 15 million views, and he is the author of the multimedia e-book *Rome on Foot*.



BAM *Why Europe, other than its history? What is particularly compelling about European cities today?*

CALLAN They have a relatively compact and dense configuration where you have walkable pedestrian neighborhoods. In European cities, most people do not live in suburbs. Americans are getting stuck in traffic more and more. In Europe, that's not the case, because their cities are dense, and their mass transit works more efficiently.

BAM *Why do your trips involve trains?*

CALLAN Trains between the cities are just a great way to get around. They are efficient, clean, modern, and not terribly expensive. The station is right in the heart of town. You can ride a high-speed train 175 miles an hour to the next city in a couple of hours. On the other hand, if you want to go to little villages, then you're going to want to rent a car.

BAM *What's the best way to find lodging?*

CALLAN In smaller cities, I just use a Google map of the town. I see where the station is. [Google] has many hotels plotted right on the map. A map-based app is a good way to get a preliminary

selection of hotels, and then you want to drill down and look at their reviews and pictures. In the bigger cities—London, Paris, Rome—stations are out on the edge of town, and you want to find lodging that's more central.

BAM *What are the must-sees in Europe?*

CALLAN First of all, London, Paris, and Rome are a must if you have not been to Europe, for at least three days each. You could easily spend a week in each one of those. If you do stay a week, you have time for day trips outside of town.

BAM *What sort of day trips?*

CALLAN If you're in London, you could hop on a train and go down to Bath or go up to York. In Paris, you can go out to the Loire Valley, or Rouen, into Normandy. You can purchase little van tours that will take you out there, or some places you can go to by train. For Rome, you could go to the Tivoli Gardens or to Ostia Antica; you can actually take the Rome metro to the seaside. Most people never go out there, but it's almost like a Pompeii.

BAM *What kind of preparation do you advise for European travel?*

CALLAN Walk. That's what I always tell my clients. One of the great joys is walking around in these places. I say walk at least half an hour a day for a couple of months before your trip. Read up a little bit on these places, establish some goals, some particular museums that you're interested in, [and] some particular artwork. A great way to deal with the research is to save it as a web archive. Then you can just transfer that to your mobile device. Also, scan in chapters from travel books. When you're there, the night before you're going to visit the place, that's when the reading really pays off. It's not a bad idea to have your schedule planned, with the hotels booked.

BAM *What about time of year?*

CALLAN You really don't want to go in the winter. It's too cold and dark. You know, it gets dark at five o'clock. Summer is too hot and increasingly crowded. The best seasons are spring and fall: middle of April to beginning of June, and middle of September to early November. Italy is good pretty much year-round.

BAM *How did Brown prepare you for being an international tour guide?*

CALLAN The humanities were really important. They really, really paid off for me in my life in unexpected ways. In my English composition class, Professor [W. Nelson] Francis told me something I've never forgotten, which is you write the way you speak, you write in a conversational way. I've become a good salesman using my words. I lead groups through many museums while describing the great works, so two other important professors were [New Yorker cartoonist] Ed Koren, from whom I took a studio art course, and Vincent Tomas, teaching philosophy of art.

—KENT ROBERTS '00

For more on Dennis Callan's guided European tours and to access his travel video library, visit www.toursbytrain.com and www.tourvideos.com.

PHOTO COURTESY DENNIS CALLAN

Dennis Callan's Web site features more than 500 virtual tours of his travels around the world, all free for the viewing. The Isle-based travel guide started shooting videos in the 1980s.

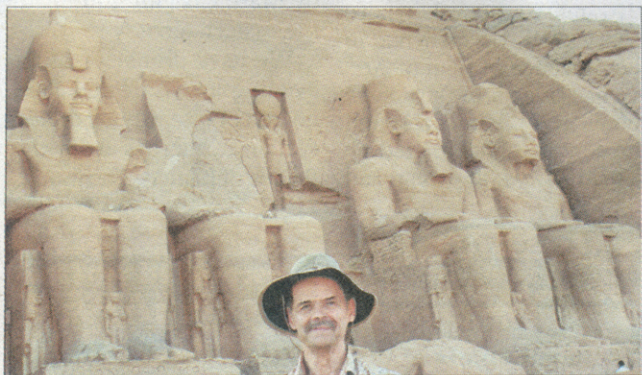
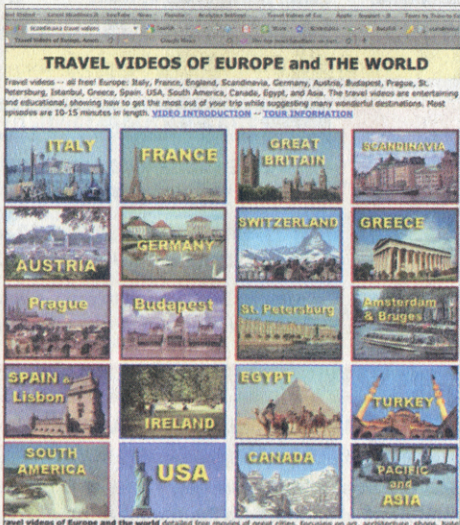


Photo courtesy of Dennis Callan

Dennis Callan at the Abu Simbel temples in southern Egypt. Callan leads tours and makes videos for his travel Web site.

Travel guide's videos offer window on world

BY CHRIS OLIVER

Advertiser Staff Writer

In Cairo's bustling street markets, spice baskets, alabaster pots, papyrus, produce and cotton goods jam the sidewalks. Brick ovens are cooking flatbreads; goats wander freely around busy outdoor cafes.

Threading through these streets, a Hawai'i tour group is heading by bus to the Pyramids at Giza, where they're met by camels and their handlers. It's the first day of their trip, but the Hawai'i folks don't miss a beat. How else should one approach the remaining Wonder of the Ancient World?

If you'd like a quick virtual vacation, tour guide and videographer Dennis Callan has it captured on film as part of his short travel videos on Egypt at tourvideos.com.

The site, which is free, contains more than 500 of Callan's videos: mini travelogues and practical guides covering his group tours to Europe, Asia and the Americas.

"I make them educational and entertaining with a special emphasis on history, art, architecture, design, culture and modern life," Callan said.

They're also fun. Shooting home video riding a camel might be tricky for most of us but Callan records it professionally for his site.

As travel guide and president of the Hawaii Geographic Society, Callan has led groups on more than 60

tours. He began shooting videos in the 1980s when the first small 8-mm movie cameras came on the market; today he uses a High Definition Sony FX1.

Callan also presents "World Traveler," a weekly program on 'Ōlelo public access channel 53.

Want to see your itinerary on a tour? Click on your destination and you'll find hotels, the neighborhood, day to day activities, even the clothes you might need.

During spring and summer months, Callan takes four to five groups each year to destinations in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Comfortable hotels, efficient public transport and walking tours, in Callan's estimation, are the best ways to experience a city.

"Over the years, the tours have revealed what groups most enjoy on vacation," he said. "And this helps focus my video content."

EARLY YOUTUBE HIT

When YouTube came online, Callan began uploading short versions of "World Traveler" to the Internet, quickly establishing more than 2 million hits. But to make his videos easier to find, he launched his own Web site, tourvideos.com, last fall. Site traffic is slowly increasing, he said.

Callan does all the video production himself: shooting, editing, writing the narratives, polishing and adding audio. On any trip, he might shoot up to five hours of video, condensing it into multiple short segments for online.

