Longtime travel guide publishers have a proven road map for reaching readers By Elaine Aradillas | Jan 17, 2025 SUBSCRIBE by the Month Comments





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lingers: how can a printed book compete with a website's up-to-the-minute details or a telegenic content creator's aspirational allure?

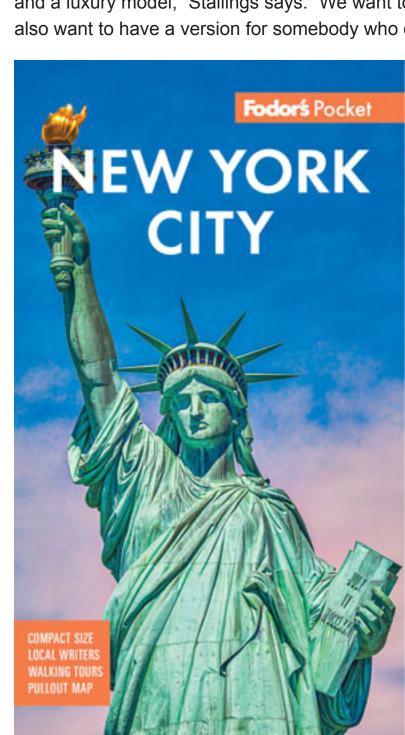
As travel publishing continues to rebound from its 2020 low, a question that predates the pandemic

The answer, according to execs at several major guidebook publishers, is that readers view legacy travel brands as trusted authorities that provide cultural insight, tailored itineraries, and expertly honed recommendations. They discussed their latest offerings with PW, explaining how they distinguish themselves from online influencers and from one another.

Package deal

The guidebook landscape has evolved considerably since Eugene Fodor published the 1,200-page 1936 on the Continent: An Entertaining Travel Annual, aimed at British travelers, followed by a version for Americans, 1937 in Europe. Comprehensive guides remain popular—the flagship Fodor's New York City 2025, for instance, weighs in at 512 pages—but that size doesn't work for everyone, says Fodor's Travel editorial director Doug Stallings.

To that end, the publisher has revived its Pocket series, last updated in the early 2000s. "We wanted to offer different products at different prices, like a car manufacturer that has a compact car and a luxury model," Stallings says. "We want to have a full-service guide to New York City, but we also want to have a version for somebody who doesn't want to invest quite as much."





and Rome following in February. Each book runs about 200 pages, includes numerous maps plus one pull-out, and details a few self-guided walking tours—"probably the best way to discover a city," per Stallings. Suggestions from locals lead visitors to restaurants and attractions that may not crack the TikTok algorithm but are nonetheless worthwhile. "I don't want to spend two hours of my life standing in line for the best frites," Stallings says. "I want

The first revamped Pocket releases are out now and cover Paris and London, with New York City

to find a place that we can recommend, where you don't have to stand in line; I think that's something a little more valuable. It's not quite as trendy, but it can make a more meaningful trip." When it comes to planning a vacation, the infinite scroll isn't necessarily advantageous, says Piers

Pickard, general manager of print and publisher at Lonely Planet, which has been guiding travelers since 1973's Across Asia on the Cheap. "It's the difference between searching and browsing—if you don't know what you're searching for, you'll never find it." But a good guidebook, he says, is "a complete package. Everything you need for your trip is within its pages." Lonely Planet's guides are for people who make travel plans with "52 tabs open on their computer,"

Pickard says. The publisher's summer travel campaign will focus on Europe, with more than 60

guidebooks pubbing in the first half of the year—updated guides to major destinations such as

Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, plus new titles, including 100 Weekends in Europe (Jan.) and the coffee-table-style Epic Van Trips of Europe (Mar.). After the pandemic, Pickard says, travelers from the U.S. were clamoring for the continent. "When the world reopened, Americans all went to Europe," he says. "It's like comfort food." Also comforting: having information at hand in parts of the world where internet access is limited. "That's

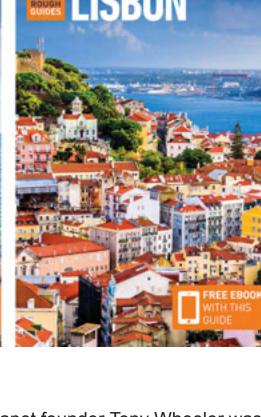
the kind of security that a book gives you," Pickard says. And when the trip is over, "You keep that guide and it goes on your bookshelf. The book becomes a totem for the trip and the memories and the experience, and that time of your life. That's another thing that only the physical object can do." Just ask Sarah Clark, head of publishing at Rough Guides. "I have my travel guides from when I was backpacking 20 years ago," she says. Rough Guides got its start even earlier: in 1982, with company cofounder Mark Ellingham's *The Rough Guide to Greece*. The 17th edition is out in May,

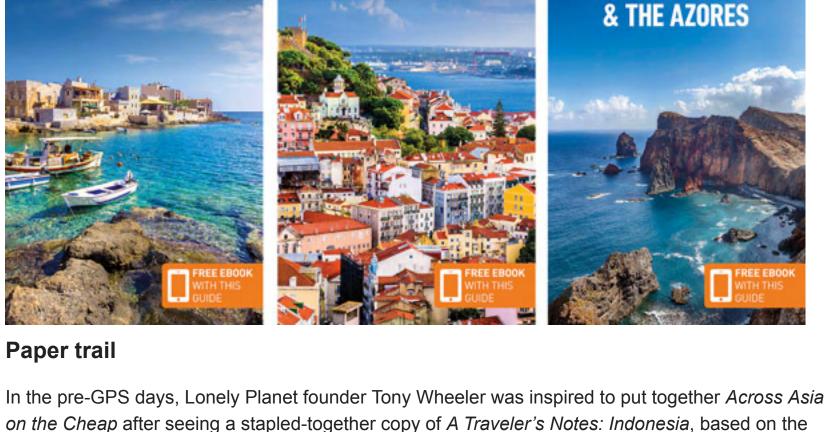
and Greece remains a core destination for the global publisher, which has also produced guides to

islands including Corfu and Crete. July sees the release of *The Rough Guide to the Peloponnese*, the brand's first full-length guide to the Greek peninsula; author Rebecca Hall, a British expat, has lived in Greece since 2008. "It's our first foray into doing a regional Greece guide that isn't concentrated on an island," Clark says. Also on the way are new, full-length guides to popular Portuguese regions: The Rough Guide to Lisbon (June) by veteran travel writers Matthew Hancock and Amanda Tomlin, and *The Rough Guide to*

Madeira and the Azores (July) by Emma Gregg, a journalist and photographer specializing in responsible tourism. "When we do new books on these places, what we're able to bring to the party is that sense of authority," Clark says. She agrees with Pickard: "Places like Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece traditional old favorites—came back very, very strongly [post-pandemic]. The main guides are our real bread and butter. They remain very practical—you'll have them with you and you'll have lots of







good maps."

mogul Rick Steves crashed on Dalton's couch while seeking his first distribution deal.) Today, Moon continues to focus on outdoor adventures and recreation, says Grace Fujimoto, editorin-chief at Moon Travel Guides, while showing readers how to slow down and experience a destination. "You don't have to rush around seeing the sights," she says. "You can have this

early 1970s travels of Bill Dalton, who went on to found Moon Guides. (Nascent travel publishing

amazing experience just sipping a glass of rosé while overlooking a beautiful scene." For example, the forthcoming *Moon Washington State* (Apr.) encourages visitors to spend time in cozy coffee shops and sample regional seafood as well as check out the state's three national parks. The guide's author, Marissa Pedersen, is a travel writer whose home base is Seattle. "We want to make sure our books encourage responsible travel, which means highlighting local businesses and including sustainability tips," Fujimoto says. "Our authors are choosing these places based on what they'd recommend to a friend. They're not paid by hotels and resorts."

father Arthur Frommer, who died in November, launched his namesake brand with 1957's *Europe* on 5 Dollars a Day. "If you want journalistically based information, you need a guidebook," she says, contrasting publishers like Frommer's with the abundance of information funneled through social media channels. But she also recognizes the utility of a strong internet presence. Frommer's was an early adopter— "We existed before Expedia," she notes—and a website overhaul is scheduled for later this month.

Pauline Frommer, co-president of FrommerMedia and editorial director at Frommer's Guidebooks,

says legacy travel brands are among the best sources of independent recommendations. Her

Frommer says the site will lose the "intrusive" ads that were added for revenue during the pandemic, and gain larger photos and a cleaner font. Traditional guidebook facts and figures will sit alongside information on current events affecting a given destination and links to relevant Frommer's titles. "We're going to reorganize the coverage so that if you want to read about Paris, it'll all be there—

the articles on the recent reopening of Notre Dame and the article about how to use the subway,"

Despite research indicating that a guidebook's "history" section is typically the least read, Frommer maintains that context is important to the modern travel experience. "We suggest experiences where you're going to meet locals. And I think we're pretty successful at inserting history and culture into the listings for restaurants and hotels," Frommer says. "My father always said—and we try to push this with our writers—travel shouldn't just be about the dead sites. It should be about better understanding the current world we live in."

Read more from our Travel Books feature. **How Travel Publishing Evolved**

Elaine Aradillas is a journalist and author based in San Antonio, Tex.

Frommer says. "It's going to be much easier to find what you're looking for.

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Guidebooks for Travel Close to Home A version of this article appeared in the 01/20/2025 issue of *Publishers Weekly* RELATED STORIES: under the headline: Don't Call It a Comeback

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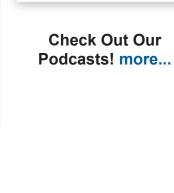
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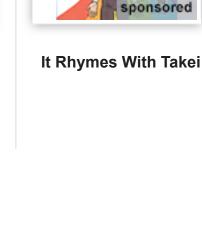




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