

Custom Travel Company 'Landed' Has Created A Market By Giving Its Secrets Away

Cheryl Conner, CONTRIBUTOR - FORBES

It is perhaps fair to say John and Erynn Montgomery, husband and wife founders of boutique travel company Landed (LandedTravel.com) were born to be entrepreneurs. In business together for more than a decade (full time since 2014), the couple's model looks belie a massive work ethic and family-first sensibility as they raise their 4 daughters in Salt Lake City, ages 13, 11, 8 and 5.

As a 16-year veteran of financial services, husband John endured several difficult business chapters before starting Mosaico Travel (now Landed) as a side hustle in 2006 that grew to become the family's full-on endeavor in 2015. For 10 years he worked long hours in commercial real estate banking, earning good money and high accolades, but the need to feed his passions created the desire to move on. His next job brought him one step closer as he ran a small travel company for 18 months in an equity earn-out deal. The equity didn't materialize, but the job required so many trips to New York he had forged relationships with some 200 agents by the time the project was done.

Meanwhile, wife Erynn was making a mark of her own at the helm of a nonprofit organization. Known for her ability to raise as much as \$500,000-\$1M in a single night, she was recruited by a team doing humanitarian and health work in Latin America, and helped to launch a program to provide micro financing for female entrepreneurs. As the organization grew, it converged with another team at a time that coincided with the birth of the couple's first daughter, creating a window for the prospective mom to move on. "I knew I couldn't handle the role and be the kind of mother I wanted to be," she recalls.

But for both John and Erynn, even with the arrival of daughters two, three and four, the desire to continue traveling as a family was intense.



Erynn and John Montgomery, founders of LandedTravel.com

"It's so great you're traveling before you have children," observers would often say to the couple, assuming that when the babies arrived, the opportunity for any significant level of travel was gone. But for John and Erynn, the remarks made them work all the harder to create adventures that allowed their family to travel together and prove the naysayers wrong.

"Our opportunities to travel have changed the way we view ourselves. They're important to our family history," says Erynn. "Entering the travel market has been a way to accomplish that. We'd save up 3-4 weeks of time off and work it out so we could take the time all at once to go to Africa, Thailand, Europe, Peru."

From his own background, John talks about his heritage as the child of a military father, moving "all of the time." His father would say, "I have the time and have to go to Korea and I can get you a seat on a web bench for \$10; who's in"

"We'd pile into a cargo plane and go to the Philippines," he recalls. "He raised us as adventurers. I was kind of a scamp."

Thus the secret marketing weapon of Landed. As a

business that provides upscale travel adventures for clients, the couple spends a great deal of time in conference calls with prospective customers.

"If we talk to a client, we have something like an 80% closing ratio," says John. But the couple has noted they're often answering the same questions again and again. There is ample information on each region on the internet, of course, but it's not the right information, not current, and isn't organized in a useful or meaningful way. So the couple began to build an extensive Word document on each of the areas they support that contain all of the questions and answers they encounter as they arrange travel to these locations. Out of this material they are creating a series of handbooks—PDF guides for each of the regions they cover.

The first guide is for Machu Picchu. Then Galapagos, Patagonia, Antarctica. The couple plans to keep going, anticipating perhaps 20 electronic guidebooks in the Latin American regions alone. The information reflects frequent questions and some of the unique requests of their clients.

"Most of our clientele is looking for five-star accommodations," says John. "But other requests provide a different kind of satisfaction. We recently planned a modest, but deeply meaningful trip for parents who'd adopted a son and a daughter about 20 years ago in Huanchaco, Peru. Some of our travelers are looking to return and experience an area's heritage, and others are seeking opportunities to perform service and do humanitarian work."

As their influence has expanded, the couple has grown its clientele, mainly by word of mouth—through the referrals of friends, friends of friends, travel agents, and hotel sales managers. "We think of our clients as part of an ever-widening circle of friends," says Erynn.

The PR challenge for Landed, then, is not a need for widespread coverage, but the desire to demonstrate the unique personality of Landed, as a company that gets to know its customers, and develops lifelong friendships with them. That care begins during the planning process, extends throughout the journey, and continues afterward.

The guidebooks are being created with the help of Sara Jane ("SJ") Murray's firm AnderImage. Murray is a copywriter and educator, who also produces social impact films and has spoken at TED. Her own ethos aligns with that of the Landed founders, helping add elements of personal development to the trip designs, cultivating non-profit sponsorships and encouraging stays at locally-owned boutique hotels.

"We provide top-tier travel experiences you can't find anywhere else—insider access and encounters with world-class experts. In that work, we're helping create bridges—lifelong friendships with hosts and deep bonds between our travelers," John says. "With the expertise and contacts we've acquired, we can enrich the journeys of anyone who visits these places. And because everyone can benefit from visiting these places, we'd like put some of our best information into everyone's hands."

To that end, Landed is offering its guidebook documents to all who would like to use them, free of charge. The first guide--Machu Picchu—is ready for free download at LandedTravel.com, with additional e-book guides coming soon.

As they grow their company, the couple is not only instilling their love of travel in their daughters, they are establishing a love of entrepreneurship as well. Under Erynn's direction, the company has launched an online community for all things family-travel related. Each member of the family, daughters included, are contributors to the Tropic of Candycorn (TropicOfCandycorn.com) where the extended community of writers provides travelogues, articles, tips and contests and travel product reviews.

As marketing goes, the concept of giving away its best secrets has been serving the travel company well. Tropic of Candycorn is an excellent PR vehicle as well, to gather like-minded individuals and create high engagement as members visit the community willingly for information and products related to the things that they love.

For this entrepreneurial family, it is clear that combining their business with their personal passion has become a winning equation for all.