In 1972 my wife Maureen and I followed what later became known as “the Hippie Trail” across Asia to Australia. Essentially you started in London and you ended up in Kathmandu, or vice versa. For many travellers that was the whole trip, but others continued on from Kathmandu, down through South-East Asia until they eventually ended up in Australia.

Thirty-five years on from when we did that trip, or 40 years on from the Summer of Love in San Francisco, there has been a great deal of interest focussed on that era. Last year the UK based Canadian author Rory Maclean wrote a book called Magic Bus about the Hippie Trail era and earlier while I was in Morocco I filmed a segment for a German-French documentary series about the same period.

That photograph was taken a day or two before my wife Maureen and I set out, it was the end of year graduation ball at the London Business School where I had just completed an MBA and I was 25 years old, Maureen was 22, even if we did look like we were really 16 and 12 respectively. We’d been married for about 9 months.

We bought an old Minivan for £65 and set out to drive it as far it would get us. It was so cheap that if it broke down we figured we would just leave it by the roadside and walk away from it. We’re crossing the Swiss Alps in an unseasonal July snowstorm. In years to come somebody will be claiming that was what European summer weather was like before global warming kicked in.
It was an English car so, naturally, it overheated. But we continued right across Europe and crossed from Europe to Asia in Istanbul, at a time when the first bridge across the Bosphorus was still under construction, so there was a real feeling of change as you went from one continent to another by ferry.

We continued right across Turkey and into Iran and down to Isfahan. Maureen in Isfahan at a time, of course, when women did not have to cover their hair and dress in Islamic fashion.

Our fine little car kept on running, here we’re approaching the Afghanistan border.

And we finally sold it – for a small profit – in Kabul. Here it is in the customs compound in the Afghan capital. I tell people today it was probably Osama bin Laden’s getaway vehicle.

At that time the Pakistan-India border was only open for three hours a week. We turned up in Lahore the night before and arrived at the border in time for the opening.
On our first wedding anniversary we were at the Taj Mahal, Agra, India and started a tradition of having our photograph taken every wedding anniversary. Often in somewhere new.

Spinning the prayer wheels at the Buddhist Bodhnath Stupa in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

Kathmandu, hashish shop – still legal back then.

We took the only flight of the trip from Calcutta to Bangkok and then hitch-hiked south through Thailand and Malaysia to Singapore.

From Jakarta we travelled by train and bus through Java and on to Bali. By the time we got there our money was running very low but we joined the New Zealand yacht, Sun Peddler, and sailed out of Benoa Harbour, Bali, Indonesia.
A few days out of Bali we were becalmed, the crew swimming behind the becalmed yacht in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

Mannwhile Maureen was seasick, she stayed that way for a solid week, by which time we’d eaten all the fresh food because the trip took much longer than planned.

Eventually we arrived on the beach at Exmouth, Western Australia – the planned six day trip has stretched to sixteen days and it was certainly time to arrive in Australia. “It’s time” was the election slogan for new Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, elected just a few days before.

We hitch-hiked to Perth and then shared the driving and petrol expenses across the Nullarbor Desert.

We arrived in Sydney, with twenty-seven cents left between us. And in 1973, we published Across Asia on the Cheap, the first Lonely Planet guidebook.
At the beginning of 1974 we set out from Sydney to travel up through Queensland and the Northern Territory by motorcycle.

Roads were not always that good in outback Australia at the time. This is the main road down to Uluru, or Ayers Rock as it was still exclusively known in the 1970s.

We airfreighted the motorcycle from Darwin across to what was, back then, Portuguese Timor.

And we spent the next twelve months travelling around the region, staying in places like the Hippie Hilton on the beach in Dili, Portuguese Timor.

Or the New China Hotel in Georgetown, Penang.
We met other travellers in the region, this bicyclist had ridden all the way from Belgium when we met him on a back road in Java.

We explored the cities and towns of the region.

Met the wildlife.

And finally sat down in a backstreet hotel in Singapore for the first three months of 1975 and put together South-East Asia on a Shoestring, the second Lonely Planet guidebook. We wrote, designed and put together that whole book on that small table in our two dollar a night hotel room.

The first edition of SE Asia had a yellow cover and travellers quickly began to call it “the yellow bible” and as a result it’s had to have a yellow cover ever since. This is the 14th edition which won’t be out until 2008 – you’re having a special sneak preview of the new design. We have now sold well over a million copies of this book – which doesn’t make it the best selling Lonely Planet title, but it does have a special place in my heart and in my company’s history. And in fact I believe it’s an indicator, a marker if you wish, to Australia’s place in the region.
I don’t believe anything happens all by itself. There are always a number of factors which lead to important events. Ten or 15 years ago a list was published of the 100 most important Australian books. I forget what came first or second or third, but I do remember somewhere surprisingly high up that list, it might have been 13th perhaps, was South-East Asia on a Shoestring. Of course I was somewhat flattered, but then when I thought about it, that recognition did make some sort of sense. Of course my guidebook to South-East Asia isn’t classic literature and I don’t believe for a moment that it kicked off Australia’s love affair with the region, or Australia’s increased connection with the region. But it was another indicator of what was happening in our relationship with our neighbours at that time.

It’s interesting to think back to South-East Asia in the early ‘70s, back when Maureen and I travelled down through the region for the first time on our Hippie Trail adventure and when we came back there just over a year later.

For years tourism in Thailand essentially meant GIs on R&R from the Vietnam conflict. I don’t know what the tourist figures to Thailand were back then, but I suspect they were something in the hundreds of thousands, against the 10 million visitors a year who now visit the kingdom.

The Vietnam war was just grinding to a halt, but even after the north and south were re-unified it would be many years before tourism to Vietnam restarted. Yet today Vietnam is also attracting millions of tourists every year.

Ditto for Cambodia. When Maureen and I finally visited Cambodia in 1992 you still needed an armed guard to accompany you to many of the outlying ruins at Angkor Wat. And there were probably far less than 100 visitors to Angkor when we were there. Today the ruins attract over two million visitors a year.

The Confrontation, or Konfrontasi, between Indonesia and Malaysia only ended six years before our 1972 visit. Remnants of the old Communist Party of Malaya were still hanging out in the jungle border area between Malaysia and Thailand.

Singapore had not yet become a single air-conditioned shopping centre.
In Indonesia it was only six years since Sukarno fell from power and Suharto took over. Less than 10 years had passed since the British Embassy was burnt down in Jakarta. Australian tourists were not welcomed with open arms through much of the Sukarno era.

Pioneering overland backpackers, Australian surfers and students of Balinese art and dance were still taking their first tentative steps on to Bali. Kuta Beach was still a quiet little fishing village with sandy paths winding down to the beach.

Donald Friend was one of those pioneering Australian artists in Bali and curiously he mentions in his diaries visiting David Wynn of the Wynn’s wine family who lived at the same address where I currently live in Melbourne. I’ve seen photographs of Donald Friend in what is now my back yard.

Further south East Timor was still a Portuguese colony.

And further north was China – still completely closed off to tourism in the 1970s. When people debate what the really big changes in tourism have been in recent decades it’s easy to point at the introduction of wide-bodied aircraft leading to dramatic drops in air travel costs. Or the arrival of the internet revolutionising so much of the travel industry. But I think the opening up of China is just as important. There was a very large slice of the world’s population completely closed off to the outside world. And very soon China will be the biggest tourist destination in the world for inbound tourists and the biggest tourist supplier in the world for outbound tourists.

So I’m pleased that we have recently started to publish Lonely Planet guides in Chinese, I rather like the idea of Chinese tourists exploring Italy – that’s the Italy guide – with a translation of an Australian guidebook.
China again.

The Indonesian beer company Bintang posed the thought that 'It Doesn’t Have to be a Lonely Planet' but we all know Australians are great travellers and it’s been one of Lonely Planet’s strengths to be based in a country with a strong travel tradition and a lot of travel expertise. Of course as a market it’s far too small for us to survive, only just over 10% of our worldwide sales are in Australia. And although it is a great place to be based we have never gone around shouting ‘we’re an Australian publisher.’ If people want to think ‘well Let’s Go is an American publisher doing books for American students’ and ‘Rough Guides are a very British publisher,’ but ‘Lonely Planet, where on earth are they from?’ Well that’s fine by me, I'm happy to be the international publisher that appeals to everybody.

The Canadian writer Douglas Coupland, the guy who invented the term ‘Generation X’ also coined the word ‘Terminal Wanderlust.’ The state of being so disconnected from anywhere that everywhere feels like home. Or might just as well be. I reckon I'm infected. I was born in Britain, grew up in Pakistan, the Bahamas and the United States, with short interludes back in Britain, and now live in Australia, although in recent years there have been year long interludes in France and the United States. Even when I am at home I'm typically away travelling for six months each year. So nowhere is really home, almost anywhere could be.

I sometimes wonder if Australia as a whole has Terminal Wanderlust. I'm constantly conducting little travel surveys and my methods may be unscientific but they're certainly conclusive: Australians go everywhere. I scan through hotel registers in towns in Africa, I glance back through visitors' books in churches in southern India, I check who has gone scuba diving with a Red Sea dive operator, I add up who has checked in to youth hostels along the Pennine Way in England. Everywhere it's the same story, more Australians than there should be. Come on, there are less than 20 million of us. If there's an Australian on the register there should be three Germans, seven Japanese, 15 Americans. It's never that way.

In fact my homespun surveys and gut instinct is more than adequately backed up by hard statistics and clear indicators. On measurements ranging from per capita expenditure on international travel to number of passports held relative to population Australians are always up towards the top of the charts. Perhaps we can blame it on our European settlement, the fact that unlike Americans our first European settlement was an involuntary one and we’ve been trying to get away ever since. So perhaps that need to leave, that need to hit the road, to go somewhere, anywhere, everywhere, has been in the Australian psyche from the very start.

Or perhaps it's a result of that more modern affliction, the 'cultural cringe' when as an Australian you simply hadn’t made it unless you’d tasted success outside of Australia. Or perhaps it’s simply time and space, when the ‘tyranny of distance’ stretches 24 hours to Europe when you do make the escape from our shores you really want to stretch the trip out. Or perhaps it’s the country itself, if it infected the original Aboriginal Australians with the urge to go 'walkabout' perhaps it’s simply passed that travelling DNA on to us.
Whatever the causes that urge to travel seems to be hard-wired into Australians and in the 35 years I’ve been in Australia while we’ve not kicked our European love affair we certainly seem to have taken on an Asian one as well. I’m very proud to have played a small part as a matchmaker for that affair. There are lots of things I’m proud about with Lonely Planet, but one of them is that we’re an indicator of our interest in our neighbours. When you can point out to somebody that you’re so interested in their country that you’ve done a book about it, a better book than anybody else from any other country has done, I shows, I feel, a real respect for them.

So I’m very glad that back in Lonely Planet’s early days we published ground breaking or unique guidebooks like our first book to Papua New Guinea

Now in its 7th edition.

Or Burma.

Now in its 9th edition.
And most of all India

Now in its 11th edition and another book well beyond one million copies. It’s a book I’m particularly proud of for a number of reasons. I wrote a substantial part of the very first edition so I’ve got the author’s feeling of ownership as well as the publisher’s. It’s always been a book that’s been a critical as well as a popular success, the critical acclaim is nice but back in 1981, when the first edition came out, the fact that we sold a shitload of them was even more important. But best of all it’s a book which in India you will see not only Australians, Europeans and Americans using but also Indians. And for any guidebook that’s the best compliment of all.

As a business we’ve also tried to put some of our profits back into the countries we’ve published books about. So a couple of years ago when my wife Maureen and I were walking in Nepal on the Annapurna Circuit we were able to drop in on a school Lonely Planet had constructed in the Himalaya.

On a recent visit to Burma with Maureen and our daughter Tashi we walked across a Lonely Planet financed bridge for a village at Inle Lake.

And last year Maureen and I went up to the earthquake region of Pakistani Kashmir to see the work of Australian Aid International which we had helped with.
Travel is what connects us so it’s terrific when people go to a place, fall in love with the place and its people and then want to go back and do something worthwhile. It’s a long way from Asia, but just a few weeks ago in Tanzania I was knocked out to visit the School of St Jude, a huge project bringing education to Tanzanian kids who would normally have fallen way outside the safety nets. It’s a project driven almost single-handedly by the efforts and genius of one Australian woman: Gemma Sisia. This wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for travel. It’s been said repeatedly, but I’ll say it again, the outpouring of support from Australians for the tsunami victims was inspired by the fact that so many Australians had travelled to those regions, who felt a connection to those people.

Did I Wreck These Places – I’m regularly accused of wrecking places. You know that place was wonderful, quiet, peaceful, serene and unspoilt until you came along and did a guidebook about it.

Bali – for example. Kuta Beach would still be a quiet little fisherman’s village if we hadn’t published South-East Asia on a Shoestring. Oh sure, I widened the runway, bought the aircraft, built the hotels, set up the tour companies. It’s all my fault.

So I’m fairly certain I’ll soon be accused of wrecking Afghanistan. Since we have an Afghanistan guidebook coming out in a few weeks.

Bad Lands – In fact I really like going to the odd and unusual places in the world I say that George Bush inspired my new book Bad Lands, because as soon as he said there was an Axis of Evil my first thought was, well I’ve got to go there. So I travelled to the countries on his – and Mr Howard’s – axis. All of them in Asia of course.
And then added a number of other bad places including, in Asia, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. Of course our governments and the media tend to demonise these places, but always, when you go there and meet people from these countries you find there’s another story, a back story to the headlines. As for terrorism in our country, well our government has managed to reduce it to fridge magnet slogans.

Or a black comedy featuring Mohammed Haneef, Kevin Andrews and Keystone Kops.