

Travel Writers Exchange Interview: Lisa Lambden, Travel Channel Academy

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Trisha: Welcome everyone; I'm Trisha Miller founding partner of Travel-Writers-Exchange.com, the online community for experienced and aspiring writers and travel journalists. We have with us today Lisa Lambden, managing director of Rosenbloom Associates, Inc. Lisa, welcome to our podcast.

Lisa: "Thank you."

Trisha: Lisa writes and produces, "What's Your Trip?" a user generated content series for the Travel Channel and in partnership with the Travel Channel; she's founded and runs [The Travel Channel Academy](#), which is the subject of today's interview. You can [read Lisa's full and very impressive biography](#) on our website at Travel-Writers-Exchange and you'll also be able to find a link there to the Academy as well.

Trisha: Lisa to start with a number of our travel journalists have written and asked us about your Travel Channel Academy program. We did review the FAQs and they give a lot of information, so I'm not going to ask you to repeat what is already on your website. But we do still have a few questions and before we get into the questions, could you tell us a little about your experience with the Travel Channel Academy program?

Lisa: Yes, absolutely. We began the Travel Channel Academy in May, 2007. We ran a pilot in Miami, we partnered with the Travel Channel, and we decided that if we got 12 people that that would be enough to run the academy and so we kept our fingers crossed and within 48 hours we had 500 people who wanted to sign up. So a huge success, and we were surprised at just how many people were out there looking for that kind of training, and we've pretty much gone from strength to strength. We trained about 1,000 people so far, we run programs all the time, if you go to the [Travel Channel Academy.com](http://TravelChannelAcademy.com) website, you'll see all the dates are already posted for 2009. We've got some very interesting locations, we're hoping to be in Vail Resorts in March, and San Francisco in June, in addition to the usual venues that we work out of which is the City University in New York, Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, and, of course Travel Channel Academy headquarters which are in Washington, D.C.

Trisha: Wow, that is great and exciting and the new locations are really great. You know our journalists come from all backgrounds, we have experienced writers and travel photographers and we have brand new beginners. Can you describe to me what the typical person who attends the Travel Channel Academy is like?

Lisa: Well having trained thousands of people, the one thing I can tell you about people who attend the Travel Channel Academy is that there is no typical person. The people who've been through the training so far are from very different backgrounds, they have very different levels of experience, some people have edited before, some people have shot before, some people have never even turned on a camera, people are all over America and some from abroad, and they all come with one unifying factor which is they love to travel and they watch the Travel Channel. But they have many, many different reasons why they take the course. Some people are looking for some motivation in their careers; many people are looking to change careers. I think travel writing and travel journalism is very much a creative field that is very inspiring to people, and they see the training as a way of getting from perhaps a job that they feel is mundane and boring into something that is much more fun and creative, and the Travel Channel Academy is certainly a great bridge from getting from something that you're doing now that you're not very happy with into something that is much more fulfilling and, of course, what's unique about

the Academy is we have this very close relationship with Travel Channel, and that's something that the students continue and it's unique in training courses. If you look around and see what is available for people to take in terms of travel journalism, there really isn't anything else like this on the market anywhere, where you get to learn great shooting and story-telling skills, but marry to that you make a relationship with a cable channel and the executives there take a real interest in this program, they're very excited about the program, and I think that this is something that is part of their core business now.

Trisha: You know that's very true. It is so unique, there is just nobody else out there offering what Travel Channel Academy is offering right now. One of the things that I'm most interested in is the explosion of video on the web and so my question is, the academy seems to be very focused on professional video production. Does it also teach students skills needed to create video content that would be suitable for their own websites as well as for television?

Lisa: Yes, absolutely it does. You would be amazed how many people take the Travel Channel Academy because they have a website or they work for a website and they want to incorporate videos and it's kind of a Gresham's Law that less dynamic media is driven out by more dynamic media. And, it's not lost on anyone now that the web is absolutely going to video in every single respect. Whether you sell your car, whether you sell your house, whether you need to get a date, whether you travel, whatever it is that you do, you are going to be doing it in video and video literacy fields are very important. And, although we talk about television production and we discuss that during the academy we very much focus on producing video for the web also because getting into television production is much, much more difficult than getting into making videos for the web and most people see the web as a starting point for them and perhaps they want to migrate into television later, so we spend a lot of time talking about the kind of video that works well on the web, about keeping the videos short and punchy – the kind of thing people would want to watch on the web and also making sure that shots are framed correctly, nice and tight, so that on the web it looks good, and you would be surprised, I think, at how many people are just at the academy because they want to put video on their website and that's really the skill that they're looking for.

Trisha: That's terrific! I did notice in reading through the information and all of the FAQs on your website that Final Cut Studio or Final Cut Express is required for the program. Are there any preliminary home studies that students could do to prepare before they come to class?

Lisa: Yes. I mean, Final Cut is a great software, and there are a lot of editing software out there and you know people work on different platforms, they have different platforms that they like. We like Final Cut because it's so intuitive and it's so easy to learn and in the classes which run up to 40 people, we have everyone finish two stories during the four days without exception and that is in no small measure due to the fact that Final Cut is such a user friendly software, and to prepare before the class, obviously there are books like Peach Pit Press that give you instructions. I think my preference is for online learning. We're about to launch a new business called "New York Video School.com" and that takes all the training that we do and puts it online and has specific modules for Final Cut. So whether you're somebody who just wants to dabble a little bit in Final Cut, whether you want to learn a little bit about the program before you take the academy or whether you want to go much deeper into the software, then New York Video School.com is going to be something that you can do online, it will be a subscription at a very low rate, and I think that for people who want to prepare for the class, it will be an excellent way for them to go through some of the steps, and feel that they learn a little bit about it before they start. And, of course, you know the Apple Store runs courses also. You can sign up and learn a little bit about Final Cut before you go. But I should make it clear that there is absolutely no requirement to learn anything about editing before you take The Academy. We literally start from scratch and you know even people who have been through Final Cut training before tell us that they find our training is much simpler and much easier to follow. Yesterday, I taught a course at City University here in New York and somebody who's been through a three day Final Cut course said to me that she learned more in an afternoon than she learned in three days of an official Final Cut course. So I think that we've managed to boil the training down so that anyone can learn it and anyone can come away with a finished piece and know that they edited it themselves.

Trisha: Wow that's impressive. And your plans for New York Video School.com sound really interesting and intriguing. I'll have to be sure to follow up with you on that when it launches. My next question is, umm, this actually came to us from another one of our site members.....Who moderates your alumni forum for the Travel Channel Academy graduates and how much access do these students have to actual Travel Channel employees after they graduate from The Academy?

Lisa: Well the alumni is a very important part of the Travel Channel Academy because people are basically taking the training and then made a relationship with the Travel Channel and this is something that I've said that the Travel Channel is very serious about. They have staff who run the alumni, there is one specific contact that people will be given when they've taken the course. When you take the course you are given exclusive access to part of Travel Channel Academy.com, which is just for the alumni. It's password protected, and you will only receive a password if you've actually been through the training and that part of site contains a lot of very useful information for people who've been through the academy and our planning to go out and start filming. There are producers tool kits on there, there are legal releases, and a lot of useful information about the kinds of assignments that the Travel Channel is looking for in terms of content and it's a very well populated site. It has lots of previous academy graduate videos on and lots of forums and discussions and you know places where people can go and ask questions about projects that they may be thinking of filming. So the alumni forums is a very useful place to go and in terms of access to Travel Channel employees, as part of the alumni program, you can upload the videos that you make and receive feedback from Travel Channel executives and that is a very planned out system so that you know exactly what you will get if you make a video after the course, you upload it to The Academy website, you're given specific upload instructions and then you are given a time frame when you will receive feedback on your film and that's very helpful for anyone who is starting out and something that I would urge people to take advantage of. What you're signing up for here is not just The Academy but ongoing feedback from people who work in the business and that I think is very valuable.

Trisha: Yes, very valuable. That definitely can open a doorway on a career for people. In watching the Travel Channel, which I do all the time, I noticed that there are a lot of "top 10" style shows, like top beaches, man versus food type of programming. Are there any particular themes that the Travel Channel is looking for as far as content right now?

Lisa: I think the Travel Channel's biggest push at the moment is on short form content. I mean, I know that people who take The Academy they've all watch the channel, but really the big growth market is online and online video and people who take the course understand from the executive presentation during the course that this is an area where the Travel Channel really wants to expand content for the internet, content for mobile phones; it's all the way that people want to see video now. I think that the Travel Channel programming probably is, you know in many ways, quite distinctively different from what is appearing online and there is certainly a lot of short form content that people look at what's on Travel Channel.com now, there's a lot of short form content there that would inform you about the kinds of things that Travel Channel is looking for.

Trisha: Wow, that's great! And you're absolutely right, the internet has changed the way we watch everything, and short form is definitely what a lot of people are interested in right now. My last question is this, Lisa, if there was just one piece of advice that you could offer to somebody who wants to take this course, what would that be?

Lisa: My advice would that I think that people – everybody has a dream, everybody has something that they would like to do in their life, and I think most of us spend more time talking about what we would like to do than actually doing it, and I think if there is one piece of advice that I could give it would be to fulfill that dream and really do something to make it realizable, and I think The Academy is a great example of somewhere people can go when they have a dream, something they aspire to and travel writing and traveling in general and filming your travel experiences is a very creative outlet for most people, and I think they see The Academy as a stepping stone to making that dream a reality. I can think of a couple of people who've been through The Academy in the past, in fact somebody who was on the very first academy in Miami, has come from a kind of very different background, has been a sports journalist and a

backpack journalist, but really wanted to get into the travel field, and she took The Academy and she worked extremely hard and was extremely motivated and she really worked to make her dream come true, and she was subsequently hired by the Travel Channel. She produced a lot of very interesting work. You can see her work now - her name is Allison Otto. She produces short form content for the Travel Channel that you can see online and she was somebody who I think was a great example of a person who had a dream, and instead of talking about the dream, actually went and made it reality. And, she's had a very successful career, so have other people who have been through The Academy. I think if you, you know live now, and don't talk about it but actually get on and do it, it's a great opportunity.

Trisha: Very good advice. And, I know I'm actually looking forward to taking the course sometime this year. Well, Lisa, thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We really appreciate it, and thank you for educating us on your Travel Channel Academy program, which listeners grab your pens and pencils – that can be found at www.TravelChannelAcademy.com. We will have a link to that posted on our website right next to Lisa's bio and where you find this podcast. And, umm, Lisa again – thank you.

Lisa: Thank you Trisha; and we look forward to seeing you at The Academy very soon.

Trisha: Thanks!