

Taking a world-class travel business international

Luxury tour operator Scott Dunn has been creating highly tailored travel experiences for guests since 1986. The firm sought to expand internationally in order to enhance its offering and chose Inflexion as its partner for the journey. Scott Dunn talks us through the experience to date.

Scott Dunn

As travel specialists, expertise on the destinations we offer is crucial to ensure our guests get the best possible experience. An overseas presence was an ambition as it would enable us to better know our destinations, tap into the growth opportunities in the US and Asia markets as well as enable us to offer a round-the-clock personal service to our guests.

Our first port of call was the US, and we chose the West Coast as the eight-hour difference gave us the most optimal time-zone coverage. We were already familiar with Aardvark Safaris, a high-end Africa travel business, so decided to expand through acquisition rather than greenfield. Their values, service, ethos and quality of product offering were all in keeping with Scott Dunn's own. Negotiations took place shortly after Inflexion's investment in 2014 and we closed the acquisition in early 2016. We moved swiftly to rebrand it, ensuring the look and feel of the website and guest collateral was in keeping with our own.



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The Aardvark acquisition was the first time Scott Dunn had set up a sales operation outside the UK, and we are proud to have made our US acquisition a success: in just two years the revenues have grown five-fold; the team has done a magnificent job. We have learned a lot from that experience, namely that we are capable of expanding internationally whilst retaining our values and high-quality offering.

Once we bedded down in the US, we turned our attention to Asia. Growing affluence and an increased desire for luxury international travel were factors that attracted us to the market. To test the opportunity, we opened a small office in Singapore in September 2016 with four people in it.

Our presence bore fruit and convinced us we wanted to build a significant platform there. Inflexion were very helpful; they really took the time to understand our focus on values rather than just the size and price of potential target companies. Their Asian in-country expert Xuan Ye proved invaluable in identifying the targets that were congruous with Scott Dunn's aims and ethos.

Once a shortlist of target acquisitions was identified, we worked with Inflexion to ultimately select Country Holidays, a Singaporean-headquartered business with a 20-year heritage. It took 15 months of careful negotiation with the owner to convince him we would be good custodians of the business he had meticulously built over two decades; it was not purely a financial transaction for him. In turn, we too needed to gain comfort that he would be the right representative for Scott Dunn in Asia.

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We have not now done all we wanted to do from an international expansion point of view. We've always said Scott Dunn should have three locations and we have that with the UK, US and Asia. From now on it's about driving the growth in these markets as well as continuing to grow our business at home.



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