

“PASSPORT REQUIRED: International Touring without an Agent, Manager or Record Label”

by "Chicago" Mike Beck

PASSPORT REQUIRED: International Touring without an Agent, Manager or Record Label will be the first book to specifically address the already significant and rapidly growing interest in opportunities for touring internationally among musicians, singer-songwriters, independent recording artists, and other performers.

Although anybody with an interest in touring internationally may find this to be of value, this excerpt from the forthcoming book is specifically for those at the Planet Bluegrass SongSchool that have an interest in attending Mike's "International Touring" workshop on Wednesday, August 14th at 4:15pm. The value of the workshop session will be greatly enhanced by taking a few minutes to read the following excerpt from Mike's book. It's not required, but he hopes that by reading Chapter 1 from his book, your imagination will begin to percolate and you'll show up for class on Wednesday having already considered one of the most important questions there is about touring internationally --- Why!

Excerpted from **“PASSPORT REQUIRED: International Touring without an Agent, Manager or Record Label”** by "Chicago" Mike Beck

CHAPTER 1: Why?

The “Why” of touring overseas -- your motivation and goals for the tour -- should and will shape every aspect of your planning, promotion, and execution of the tour. We open with a robust examination of the reasons for touring outside your home country.

Why Are You Going On Tour?

Touring as a musician can be immensely rewarding in numerous ways, but it can also be exhausting, frustrating, anxiety-inducing, financially risky, taxing on personal relationships and disruptive to a stable life. Touring in foreign territories can amplify or exacerbate those challenges.

Why do you want to tour in foreign locations?

Though the reasons to tour overseas may seem obvious -- fame, fortune, adventure and glory -- you will find it beneficial to get a bit more specific and concrete when considering touring internationally. Asking yourself some of these questions now will help you focus your efforts and maximize your chances of success for your first international tour.

Practical choices you make about planning your tours should be shaped and heavily influenced by your goals, so it is in your best interest to get very clear on what your priorities are and why you wish to tour overseas.

For example, if short-term profit is a top priority, you will probably be less inclined to dedicate a “night off” to performing on a radio show or at an open mic, as these activities are unlikely to generate any immediate financial reward. You might be better served spending that time busking* if you're unable to book a paid gig.

However, if your priority is developing an overseas region for ongoing touring opportunities in the future, radio shows and open mics can be incredibly valuable in numerous ways, which I'll touch upon later in this chapter under **“The 5 Categories of International Tours”** section.

It is also worth your due consideration to contemplate the specific reasons why you want to tour in a foreign territory, as opposed to touring domestically. Is it because the pay scale is higher? Do currency exchange rates suggest you'll earn more touring overseas than at home? Is it for the enriching cultural experience? To exercise and expand your language skills? All these reasons are valid, but it will be advantageous to get clear on which of these are preeminent in the scope of your personal ambitions.

Most of us recognize that touring outside of our home region, even domestically, offers us the opportunity to connect with new audiences, develop new territories, sell merchandise (everybody in your home town already has your latest album, right?), and perhaps achieve acclaim or recognition beyond your own backyard. For many performers, touring is the only viable way to earn enough money on an ongoing basis to sustain life and a career as a musician. Though some musicians are able to make it work, it can prove difficult to remain in one location and keep one's performance calendar full enough to pay the bills without supplementary income through activities such as teaching or sideman work.

But this book is specifically focussed on *international touring*, so I will suggest that you consider the ramifications, requirements and benefits of touring domestically separately from your ambitions to tour in foreign territories; But the motivations, opportunities and challenges of touring domestically are certainly also worthy of your consideration. Perhaps you're already touring domestically (i.e. in your home country). Great! That will give you experience and expertise that will prove valuable in your international touring endeavors as well.

For myself, I had never toured as a performer in the USA before I started touring in Europe. I had done a few "out and back" weekends involving some road trips to gigs that were several hours away, but I had never embarked on a series of performances that stretched over several weeks that did not permit the opportunity to return home between shows. From several perspectives -- not least of which are logistical considerations -- this is a very different endeavor than "out and back" shows away from home.

In these pages, I won't focus much attention on the idea of touring domestically. There are some good articles and other resources available on this topic (I list a few in the bibliography at the end of Section 5). Though some of the same principles and concepts may apply, and you may find this book contains valuable insights that might also enhance your domestic tours, the focus of this book is specifically on international touring. However, if you haven't been "on tour" before, you might wish to spend some time reflecting on whether or not touring life is a good fit for your personality and personal needs. Life on the road has been romanticized so extensively, many people don't realize they really don't or won't enjoy the touring life until they've experienced it for themselves!

The following pages outline some of the principle purposes for and benefits to be derived from international touring. In broad terms, some of the possible benefits for touring internationally include:

Economic benefits

- New venues, gigs that pay better
- Economic growth: i.e. getting paid more for gigs than what you get paid now! I earn substantially higher performance fees in Europe than I do in the USA -- Often two to three times what I might earn from a typical domestic bar gig.
- Selling merchandise
- Royalties: Performance royalties for artists performing original music are often significantly higher for live and broadcast performances in Europe than they are in the USA.

One of your reasons for touring in foreign territories might be to earn money. Perhaps you've seen that exchange rates in many countries appear favorable, or maybe you've received offers for some overseas gigs and the offer price is significantly higher than what you earn for your domestic gigs. For example, in my case, I typically earn about \$200 - \$300 for most of my domestic solo gigs, but overseas I customarily earn between

\$400 - \$800 for a comparable solo gig, which often includes dinner and sometimes lodging. In the USA, some gigs don't even include free drinks, while in Europe they almost always do.

Though "Career benefits" are closely intertwined with the "Economic benefits" outlined above, I use the heading "Economic benefits" to describe some of the short-term / immediate benefits that can accrue from international touring, whereas "Career benefits" will tend to include opportunities that might pay off over a longer time horizon. These opportunities can certainly convey extraordinary value, and eventually translate into economic benefits, but the practical benefits of what I refer to as "Career benefits" are often hard to quantify or enumerate, and usually accrue over longer spans of time -- perhaps over several tours, or several years touring in a region -- as opposed to providing immediate economic benefit. Yes, receiving radio airplay in a region can vastly expand awareness for your music, but it doesn't necessarily put cash money in your pocket during *this* tour.

Career benefits

- Expanding your audience
- Expanding your touring territories
- Enhanced credibility: Before I started touring in Europe, few venues bothered to return my calls or respond to my emails. After my first European tour in 2001, all of a sudden, members of the music industry in the USA began to take notice, give me a shot or respond more favorably.
- Build your reputation and mythology
- Expanding your musical network (musicians, team members, fanbase)
- Publicity back home: Your local newspaper will almost certainly give you some love before you leave on your first tour of Europe or Asia, or when you get back... Or both!
- International press and publicity: Few things in your press kit will have the impact that clippings, photos and articles written in a foreign language can have. Sure, people may not be able to read the article without the help of human or technological translators, but just seeing them immediately establishes you in their eyes as an artist with an international presence and renown.

Artistic benefits

- Artistic inspiration received by expanding your worldview and exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking
- New and out-of-the-ordinary experiences may serve to inspire your artistry in new directions, influence your musical trajectory, and / or expand your musical knowledge
- New opportunities for artistic collaboration that might not exist domestically
- New musical textures, trends and sonic influences to which you might not be exposed "back home"

Personal benefits

- Personal enrichment through travel outside your home country
- Experiencing other cultures: Music, dance, language, etiquette, history and more
- Culinary delights and varied cuisine that can only be experienced locally
- Musical and other cultural experiences that require your physical presence to appreciate
- Exploring historical treasures, sites and locations -- These could include museums, art galleries and historical sites such as *Le Louvre* in Paris, *Angkor Wat* in Cambodia or The Cavern Club where The Beatles played in the early days of their career in Liverpool, England, or perhaps you want to record a song at Abbey Road Studios. You can.
- Exploring your own personal genealogical heritage; Visiting relatives in distant lands
- Working vacation: Visiting other countries as a touring musician is a vastly different, and in many ways, richer experience than visiting as a tourist.
- Opportunities to contribute to and participate in building international understanding and peace

It might prove a worthwhile exercise to pull out your highlighter and, on the lists above, highlight the top 5 benefits you hope to derive from your international touring. Some of the value in doing so will become obvious during the process -- For example, if you designate exploring historical sites as one of your priority benefits, you'll schedule your tour to include enough time (perhaps entire days off from gigging) to spend time at the sites you wish to visit. You would also geographically route your tour to bring you closer to those locations.

This same approach would also apply to those interested in spending time connecting with international friends or relatives. A full schedule of gigs (and requisite transportation between them) does not permit much time for casual and relaxing visits with people with whom you wish to spend time. Similarly, finding romance while on tour may prove more logistically challenging than you might think! It's often the case that once the gig ends, you need to pack up and hit the road right away, even though your heart or libido may cause your imagination to begin concocting scenarios where the band leaves without you and you meet up with them at the next venue. It ain't always that easy! Believe me!

If your priority is developing a foreign territory for the long term -- i.e. you hope to return to that territory on a regular basis for repeat performances (perhaps annually), your strategy may favor activities that maximize your chances to build your musical network -- Open mics, jam sessions, opening for other bands, etc., in addition to a full calendar of your own headlining performances.

If short-term profit is top priority, you'll probably want to max out your schedule with as many gigs as possible, with minimal time off, and fill in the empty unscheduled times with busking. You'll also want to make sure you have a robust supply of merchandise to sell (CDs, USB drives, t-shirts, hats and other specialty items), as well as clear, highly legible signage showing pricing for the items you're selling and an attractive merchandise display that you can set up quickly at each performance, along with a system for tracking sales and inventory. It can be financially devastating to run out of merch mid-tour, so knowing how much you're selling, when to re-order and how much inventory you need on hand are all critical to your profitability. You must also consider the cost and logistics of getting your merchandise to the locations where you need it. It is often far more cost effective to manufacture items locally (in the countries where you intend to sell them), rather than shipping them from "back home". This approach can also be helpful in avoiding unexpected delays shipping merchandise from outside the country, getting your product through customs, customs fees and duties, intellectual property concerns and other obstacles.

There may be other benefits that are not included in my lists above, and some of these may be very important to you! Please take a moment to make your own list of these additional benefits and include them in your analysis. Feel free to share them with me: mike@chicagomike.com. If they are benefits that could prove to be of universal value to others, I may include them in the next edition of this book!

Only *you* know what's important to you -- And you might not even know... yet! Sometimes it's necessary to embark upon your first international tour without knowing why. That's OK. The why will likely be revealed, but may not become apparent until you're already there. And it may be a completely different "why" than you thought it would be.

There are many excellent reasons to tour overseas, both professional and personal. This chapter suggests several worthy of consideration, and there may be more. As you read through the lists below, consider not only which reasons apply to you, but which ones resonate with you most profoundly. You may find that you identify multiple relevant reasons and goals.

On the PassportRequired.net website, you can download a worksheet that will help you prioritize the various benefits outlined above. You may find that completing this worksheet will enable you to have a more successful tour -- Success as you define it in terms of *your* priorities, goals and ambitions!

Touring involves risk. The level of risk can increase when touring in foreign countries, especially overseas. International tours are significant undertakings, not something you want to tackle without due consideration. They can be costly in terms of money, time, energy, focus and more.

Although the financial risks can be substantial and international tours can involve a bewildering array of logistical and administrative details and requirements, the rewards can also be great. Cogent planning and preparation can increase the likelihood of reaping those rewards and enjoying the greatest possible return on your investment.

In my experience, most overseas tours fall into one of the following broad “categories”, based on the benefits the musicians and other stakeholders involved wish to derive. Each “category” of international tour requires a different approach. Each may require different resources, team members, advance time, booking and promotional strategies. Reflecting upon these categories can help you achieve insights that will assist you in making sound decisions about your tour. For example, will spouses be welcome on the tour? Throughout the whole tour? During only a specific portion of the tour? Who will cover the additional expenses that the additional personnel will require?

A good rule of thumb is that each additional person on a tour will double the logistical challenges (and sometimes costs!) of the tour. One person touring alone as a solo performer can be the easiest, least logistically challenging, least expensive way to tour. But there are *caveats* to consider: There’s nobody to “man” the merch table, help shoot video, take photos of the performance, drive while the artist sleeps, etc. But in the interests of exploring this topic further, it’s reasonable to estimate that two people touring together doubles the cost and logistics. Three people *quadruples* the costs and logistics. Four people can be eight times more complicated and costly. Five people can be sixteen times more complicated and costly! The progression of complexity and cost can seem exponential, not logarithmic! So be careful what you wish for!

Of course, the “formula” outlined above is a gross generalization and the details of each tour (and type of tour) will have an enormous impact on the costs and logistics required. Will the artist or band be traveling with their own sound system? Backline? One person touring alone can often stay with friends, couchsurf or find economical AirBnB or hostel lodging. This can sometimes work for two people on tour together (especially if they’re willing to share a bed!), but a 5-piece band with a road manager will have to come up with other lodging solutions that will often be significantly more costly.

The 5 Categories of International Tours:

- 1. Full-on “Serious Career” Tour**
- 2. Working Vacation**
- 3. One-Shot Career Enhancement**
- 4. Exploratory “Recon” Mission**
- 5. First Tour of Many / Laying the Ground Work**

Throughout this book I’ll often refer to these 5 broad categories of international touring. Setting the priorities and making choices for your tour should and will be heavily shaped by which of these categories are most congruent with your tour ambitions, so achieving clarity on this can be critically important to the success of your efforts and investment.

The 5 Broad Categories of International Tours:

1) Full-on “Serious Career” Tour

Vital components: Booking agents, visas, dedicated serious team members, radio promotion, social media, marketing strategy, publicity, a substantial budget and financing.

This type of tour is unquestionably the most complicated, labor intensive and costly approach to international touring but also offers the greatest chances of profitability. The “Full-on Serious Career Tour” is likely to be the idealized manifestation of our ambitions as touring artists: Comfortable hotels, stress-free pre-arranged travel, advance ticket sales, support crew, a competent professional tour manager that handles everything so that musicians are able to use their free time as they wish, great “take-home” pay, *per diems*, and more. To be viable, these types of tours require that an artist be able to consistently sell a sufficient number of tickets at venues offering sufficient capacity.

Until an artist has gained recognition and enthusiasm in a region, they may find it very difficult to gain the attention and interest of potential team members (booking agents, for example). For many reasons, which we’ll explore further in Chapter 5, it is unrealistic to expect that booking agents will take an interest in your band or be willing to book shows for you unless you have some compelling reasons for them to do so. These reasons might include significant regional radio airplay or chart impact, high profile TV appearances, massive YouTube or Spotify success in the region, favorable press coverage or anything else that suggests to the agent that you will be a worthwhile investment of their time and credibility with venues, talent buyers, presenters and promoters.

It is worth keeping in mind that, even though these types of tours may be the ideal outcome we envision for our careers, they don’t leave much time for sight-seeing, visiting friends, or leisure. These types of tours can be all-consuming: Get to the gig, soundcheck, eat, play, talk to your fans, travel to the next gig, sleep, do it all again the next day. Because the logistical demands of touring are costly, these types of tours require a strict, disciplined professional approach and severe economic efficiency.

Since “Serious Career” tours often involve a larger number of stakeholders (booking agents, managers, tour managers, and more), the financial success of a tour (or lack thereof) can often be enormously and permanently impactful on the artist’s career, either positively or negatively. If your tours earn enough money for everyone involved, you’ll have the opportunity to do it again. If not, then not so much.

2) “Working Vacation” Tour

Vital components: Enough money “in the bank” and / or guaranteed revenue to cover your expenses while on tour

A substantial percentage of tours fall under this category. In many ways, these types of tours can be the most personally fulfilling -- Good, enjoyable gigs where their financial success isn’t “do or die” for your career, flexible tour routing, the option of leisure time for exploring the places you’re visiting, time with friends, sight-seeing, skiing in the Alps, sailing in the Mediterranean, paragliding in Turkey, whatever *you* want and can afford.

Obviously, a “Working Vacation” is just that. Profitability can’t really be a primary concern. Many artists who embark on these types of tours are over the moon if their tour “just breaks even”! But many are perfectly satisfied if their tour allows them to visit and travel around Europe at a substantially reduced cost, while having the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of playing some music during their travels.

“Working Vacation” tours, like all international tours, are heavily driven by the calendar. In Chapter 2: When?, I’ll explore in greater depth the types of questions this type of tour requires:

- How long will the tour last?
- How many “days off”?
- Geographical scope of the tour?
- Transportation logistics?

For now, consider that “Working Vacation” tours are more “experience-oriented”, rather than profit-driven, and though they can certainly (and usually do!) have a notable impact on one’s music career, this is not the primary ambition of the tour; It is rather for the artist to enjoy an international musical adventure and profound life experience. This is not to say that “Working Vacation” tours cannot be profitable -- They can. But the choices one makes in planning them are not primarily driven by their likelihood of profitability.

3) “One-Shot” Career Enhancement

Vital components: Enough money “in the bank” and / or guaranteed revenue to cover your expenses while on tour

As touched upon earlier, there can be great value and substantial impact to your music career from simply having undertaken and completed a tour overseas. Perhaps your life (or wife!) would not permit you to tour overseas on a regular basis, but you would like to have that “once in a lifetime” international touring experience for your own personal enrichment, but also for the very practical benefits that such a tour can bestow upon your career. These include publicity and promotional opportunities, as well as enhanced credibility and renown within the music industry. Having toured overseas (or even in Canada), you can now authentically identify yourself as an “internationally touring artist”.

Over 30 musicians have experienced their first overseas tours as members of my band or as co-billed artists on my tours. Most of the artists that have gigged or toured with me in Europe have found that they’ve received / nurtured / developed a lot of buzz back home (publicity, attention, enhanced credibility, etc.) by making a single trip to Europe and capitalizing on that. It’s also given them perspective on whether they want to expend all the energy / money / resources / time to try to develop their careers in the various European markets. Like the USA, Europe is a BIG place, so it’s best tackled in chunks. This has worked out pretty well for me. But for multi-instrumentalist Kort McCumber, after touring Germany and The Netherlands with me in 2006, he decided that his time and energy were better invested in developing his touring career back home in Colorado and the USA. He felt that the resources required to develop Europe as a new touring market did not warrant the investment at that particular moment in his career.

Several years later, Kort developed a musical partnership with singer-songwriter James Moors and now their duo Moors & McCumber leads successful musical tours of Ireland on an annual basis.

My personal experience has been that people in the USA (venues, agents, radio, press, etc.) are much more willing to “give me a shot” because of my overseas touring. But the investment (time, money, resources, time away from family / home) has been enormous. And this has really just started to pay off financially for me in these past few years. However, my early years of touring Europe three to four months each year also gave me some of the most amazing experiences of my life, and I’ve developed close friendships with musicians and people all over Europe. So it’s always been personally rewarding, even if it’s only recently that it has become financially rewarding.

If you’re not interested or able to tour overseas on an ongoing basis, but would like to have that experience at least once in your life, there are many benefits to doing so, both professionally and personally. The choices you make about your tour and your preparations for it should be driven by this understanding.

4) Exploratory “Recon” Mission

Vital components: Disciplined data capture (You must have a smartphone with persistent data availability!!!); Enough money “in the bank” and / or guaranteed revenue to cover your expenses while on tour

The “Recon” tour falls somewhere between the “One-Shot Career Enhancement” tour, and the “First Tour of Many / Laying the Ground Work”. It may turn out to be the former, or could also become the first of many tours to this particular region -- and finding out is exactly why you’ve decided to undertake an “Exploratory Recon Mission” tour.

Perhaps you have a curiosity or interest in exploring a specific new territory outside your home country to see if the region might be a “good fit” for you and your music. You’re not certain if you want to tour this region regularly in the future, but perhaps you want to check it out and see if your music resonates with audiences there, if you’re well received, if you connect. You want the chance to experience the area personally and discover whether you feel a connection or enjoy it. Your interest in this region may arise from a genealogical connection, or a long held fascination with a country’s history, or any number of inspirations or associations.

This was certainly the case for me when I decided to tour in Japan. When I was in my teens and early 20s, the colorful history of Japan enchanted me, imbuing me with an intense sense of fascination with the Land of the Rising Sun. The films of Akira Kurosawa, historical tales of samurai, ninja, yakuza and shogun -- These visions captured my imagination. In college at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale (circa 1986), I began taking Japanese language classes that lasted for a couple years. Nearly 30 years later, in December of 2015, I was able to put those Japanese classes to use for the very first time. Needless to say, I was a bit rusty! But I finally had the opportunity to visit Osaka Castle, see other extraordinary historical sites, as well as perform small gigs in Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo, and play live on the radio in Gunma. This visit to Japan was the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition, driven by intense personal interest which inspired me to make the substantial investments needed to set up shows and travel to perform in Japan. This tour helped me recognize that developing Japan as a profitable touring territory will require lots of patience as well as significant investments of capital, time, energy and focus.

I have plans to return to Japan next year, but I forecast that, in the current context of my career, it is likely to be several years before Japan could become a profitable touring region for me. And developing this region is by no means a guaranteed success, so it involves substantial risk as well. I might never recoup my investments in this region. My first short tours of Europe were also not profitable, and it took several trips to Europe before I began to see my tours get “in the black”. If I am able, I would love to see Japan grow for me in a similar fashion. It will take time, planning, and additional financial investments to make it happen, but I feel the investments required are worth the risk.

Expect to invest your money (or hold fundraisers or pursue crowdfunding) to finance these types of “Recon” tours, and go in with your eyes open that you may not ever recoup this investment (or may only recoup your investment in an indirect fashion). You may still find that the experience was wholly worthwhile for many different reasons, some perhaps not even connected with your music career.

It is a common perception (in my view, a misperception), that with email and cheap international calling, we can cultivate relationships with anyone anywhere. But the truth is, being physically present, meeting and dealing with people face to face is massively more effective than any other method of developing relationships. And in the music business, relationships are what it all comes down to. “Recon” tours are the most effective way to take advantage of this reality.

A “Recon” tour may indeed inaugurate extensive and consistent international touring for an artist, or it might not. Either way, “Recon” tours can have a lasting impact on artists’ careers and on the individuals involved, both personally and professionally. When it’s over, you should have earned a clearer understanding of whether or not you want to do it again, and may have accumulated some contacts, insights and opportunities worth pursuing along the way.

5) “First Tour of Many” / Laying the Ground Work

Vital components: Even greater discipline with data capture (You must have a smartphone with persistent data availability!!!); Enough money “in the bank” and / or guaranteed revenue to cover your expenses while on tour; Concrete *specific* tour dates for both your first and second overseas tours.

If you conceive of your first overseas tour as the first of many, and want to use this investment as a springboard to a life-time of repeat overseas tours, then I strongly urge you to be *incredibly* organized and work your ass off before, during *and after* your first tour.

Many if not most artists view their first international tours from a perspective of anticipating they will want to repeat the experience on a regular basis. If this is your ambition too, you owe it to yourself to maximize your chances of success. This will require more preparation and analysis than any of the other categories of international tours.

Everyone is faced with the challenge of having limited resources -- money, time, energy and focus -- which requires that we then prioritize what we want to accomplish. The mantra “work smarter, not harder” should be kept in the forefront of your mind as you approach every aspect of planning and executing your first tour. You will be making substantial investments of these resources as you undertake your first or any international tour, so it is in your best interest to maximize your ROI (“return on investment”) in every area. This means doing so, not only in financial terms, but also in terms of your time.

Speaking from my own personal experience, I can’t emphasize enough how vitally important it is to capture data about your tour and future touring opportunities in an incredibly organized fashion, and be as efficient as possible in all aspects of your touring operations. In addition to successfully executing the current tour itself, you should be constantly building, nurturing and growing opportunities for your future tours. There are only two possible outcomes: A touring career with expanding possibilities, an upward growth trajectory; or one with diminishing possibilities, a downward trajectory. Take the necessary steps to ensure yours is of the first variety! In the coming chapters, I’ll enumerate many of these steps, offer suggestions for “best practices” and dig into each in greater detail.

You’ll have made big investments of time (our most precious, valuable and irreplaceable resource) and probably money in embarking upon your first international tour, so do everything possible to ensure that your investments achieve ROI that make it all worthwhile. This includes decisions, habits and “SOPs” (standard operating procedures) that allow you to capture data about your tour and opportunities as they happen in a highly organized and efficient manner, ensuring that the data you collect can be accessed and utilized again later as you begin to work on your subsequent tours to that region. Touring life sometimes feels like being strapped to the front of a bullet train -- And you’re just trying to hang on, make it through, and absorb what you can while the world flies by in a blur. Sometimes, there’s little time for reflection, or to organize your data while *en route*. Efficient systems and habits for capturing data is one critical method for achieving that maximum return on investment, increasing your chances for future international touring.

With a “First of Many” tour, it is useful to acknowledge that profitability of this *first* tour should sometimes take a backseat to other non-monetary opportunities. For example, a live performance on a radio station won’t immediately put any euros or yen in your pocket. However, the radio exposure and airplay you receive can certainly enhance awareness for you and your music in a market and help build your audience in that region. Perhaps even more importantly, developing a close relationship with a radio DJ that is enthusiastic about your music can be extraordinarily impactful on your career. Radio DJs usually know all the other radio shows in their part of the world that play music similar to yours, they probably know all the music venues in their region where your performance would be a good fit, they’re often connected with nearby music festivals, sometimes acting as an MC for the festivals, and their radio station might even be a sponsor of the festival at which you wish to play. A good word from a trusted DJ might be just what it takes to get you on that festival bill.

Also worth your consideration: Open Mics and jam sessions won't generally result in immediate financial benefit, with the possible exception that you might sell a couple CDs or some other merch. However, if you don't have a paid gig already scheduled and find yourself with a night off in a city where there is an open mic or jam session (which means most cities), playing at one of these can bestow a great number of lasting career benefits.

In my own experience, at least half the time, when I've played at an open mic, I have pursued and received an offer from the venue to perform a paid gig of my own, sometimes the very same week that I played the open mic! If you go into open mics and jam sessions with the perspective that they can serve as a "live in-person audition", you'll find that they can be an effective way to grow your list of venues and opportunities in a region.

Not only that, but meeting, getting to know and playing with local musicians can be an exceptionally productive way to expand your network, learn about other venues, festivals and performance opportunities in a region, and possibly find sidemen or musical collaborators when you need them next time you're nearby. These are just a few of the benefits worthy of your consideration.

In the process of planning a "First of Many" international tour, don't just select the specific dates for your first tour, but *at the same time*, select the specific dates for your second tour. In the next chapter ("When?") we'll dive deeper into this concept, but you'll find that it is always best to "strike while the iron is hot". Imagine being on your first international tour, you're having one of those transcendent performance experiences that we've all experienced now and then -- You're "on", the audience loves you, the venue is elated with the success of the evening and the owner approaches you after the show. She says "Wow! What a great night! We'd love to have you back!" Now imagine being able to reply right away "Great! I'd love to come back! We're available on Friday, April 19, 2024. Would you like to confirm the date now?" Not only will they be impressed with your organizational acumen, but you may save yourself hours of work having to re-establish communications from overseas just to book the next gig. The value of this approach should not be underestimated. Your performance date will already be on the books when the intensity of that glorious evening inevitably begins to fade from everyone's consciousness.

As an independent artist, it can be incredibly challenging to make your first foreign tour profitable under any circumstances. If you approach your touring in an intelligent, organized fashion, you massively increase the likelihood that your subsequent tours can be profitable. Learning how to take advantage of the extraordinary powers conveyed to you by your smartphone is essential. Your smartphone, when setup to help you succeed and used in a disciplined fashion, will empower you to maximize your ROI. We'll discuss this further in Chapter 10: "Equipment".

If you don't already have a smartphone, buy a good one today and begin to incorporate it into your life and music career. In preparing for and executing your tour, you'll accumulate so much information so rapidly, if you don't stay on top of it, a lot will just slip away, which significantly dilutes the value of your investment. Smartphones are essential tools for every independent artist.

Business planning!

I'm a big believer in the idea that the words we use when we communicate greatly influence our outlook, perspectives and choices we make. It's easy and natural to sometimes frame or describe events in a negative way, but that often doesn't serve our interests. For example, because international touring is fraught with substantial financial risk, artists who have recently completed a tour might say "I lost money on that tour".

If you're seeking to develop an international territory for ongoing touring, it is my firm belief that it is in your interest to reject that notion and not describe your early overseas tours in terms of "loss". Rather, "I made an investment in expanding my live performance career" is more accurate and will better serve to inspire and

motivate you to continue and to grow. If we say “We lost money on that tour” we become disinclined to strive towards goals in those directions.

The biggest obstacle to success faced by the vast majority of musical artists and performers is not lack of opportunity, overwhelming competition, exploitation by nefarious members of the music industry, drugs, alcohol, a rapidly evolving and ambiguous musical marketplace, or sociological trends that have diminished the importance of live music for younger generations. It is simply a question of math. Artists don’t do enough math.

I, Mike Beck, am about to tell you the secret to success in the music business. Ready?
Math.

For any business to succeed, math is essential. We should all by now recognize that there’s no shortage of extraordinary musical talent in this world. Just spending a few minutes (or hours, or days, or years!) exploring the vast diversity of musical offerings on YouTube or Spotify should make that abundantly clear. In the realm of music, however, there is clearly a significant dearth of *managerial* talent. Of course, the umbrella term “managerial talent” includes personal managers, artist managers, business managers, and tour managers, but my usage also encompasses booking agents, attorneys, publicists, promoters, music publishers and others who can actively contribute to the endeavors connected to a career in music.

Every business has a “boss” -- Whether that boss is a CEO or president of a corporation, an individual owner of a “sole proprietorship” (a business owned by one person), multiple partners in a general or limited partnership, or members of an LLC (Limited Liability Company) -- There is typically one or more individuals charged with the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of the business. The decisions that get made directly impact the success and financial health of that business. This same principle applies to huge multinational conglomerates like Coca-Cola and Sony as it does to Joe’s Garage, the local auto shop.

One of the truths that is often overlooked by professional and semi-professional musicians is that, as soon as they’ve decided to start earning income through their music, they are *in business*. This fact becomes even more critical when someone decides that they will try to earn their full-time living through music, not just part-time supplemental income. Unless these musicians have their own significant reserves of personal wealth, a trust fund, or generous patrons, their financial success will determine whether their career is short-lived or life-long. A long-term career in music is not sustainable without sufficient income. Like any business, musicians must generate more revenue than they spend or they will face insolvency.

Ultimately, the decisions made by the boss of any business directly impact the success of that business, which, in most industries, is measured by profit and other financial metrics. There are other metrics in play within the music industry -- widespread influence, or popular and critical acclaim, for example. Even though Britney Spears has sold nearly ten times more albums than Miles Davis worldwide and commanded significantly higher fees for her live performances, few would argue that Britney Spears is a more impactful, influential or important artist than Miles Davis, even though in terms of pure dollars, she’s earned more money than Miles Davis by several orders of magnitude.

So many musicians today face insolvency (defined as “the inability to pay one’s debts”.) that there’s even a special chapter of Debtors Anonymous that was created to specifically serve musicians. They meet on Monday nights at 10pm ET by phone. Visit DebtorsAnonymous.org for more information.

This process of examining your motivations and goals is critical in that it will allow you to maximize your ROI and chances for “success”, however you’ve chosen to define that. One constructive tip is to write down -- before you start your tour -- what specifically constitutes success. By doing so, if you accomplish it, you’ll know! And if you don’t, you can examine why it wasn’t successful in the areas in which you hoped for better results. We’ll talk more about this process of defining success in Chapter 7: “Money Matters”, though there are many valid definitions of success that include far more than just “the numbers” and profit / loss statements.

Consider which of the motivations for international touring outlined in this chapter are worth investing your money, time, energy, focus, credibility and other resources.

You may also wish to examine the question of whether your time / money / energy / focus is better invested developing your domestic touring opportunities, or if your reasons for wanting to tour in foreign territories are strong enough to warrant the additional work and risk this demands. In terms of financial and career benefits, an honest objective analysis may reveal that your resources are better invested in pursuit of touring opportunities in your home country. Hopefully, the information offered in this chapter will help you in making that determination.

With the exception of Max Bialystock in *The Producers*, nobody plans to fail. But people often fail to plan. Don't let that be you! Good planning can increase your chances of achieving your career goals and having the opportunity to do more international touring in the future. Whatever choices you make, you will have a journey you'll never forget.

In the next chapter, entitled "When?", we'll dive into the many requisite temporal considerations that will shape your tour -- Duration, time of year, how many Fridays and Saturdays your tour will span, geographic scope, transportation considerations, and more. All of these factors will significantly impact the contours and every other parameter of your tour. After having invested some thought into answering "Why?" as I've outlined in Chapter 1, the next critical question is "When?" (which also encompasses the question "For how long?"). The question of "When" even supersedes the question of "Where"! Chapter 2 explains why.

Thanks so much for reading the first chapter of "**PASSPORT REQUIRED: International Touring without an Agent, Manager or Record Label**"! I hope doing so caused you to think a bit more about what you hope to get out of your international touring experience, and perhaps stimulated your imagination and motivation to start planning your first international tour! You can do it -- Make it happen!

Though I've written a few songs, as well as a couple magazine and newspaper articles, this is the first time I've tried to write a book. I would greatly appreciate any feedback -- positive or critical -- you would be willing to share with me. My email address is mike@chicagomike.com. You can also contact me at that address if you're interested in reading more from the book -- I'm happy to share additional chapters with SongSchoolers as they are completed. I am most grateful for your taking the time to read this and hope you found something of value in these pages.

I am available throughout SongSchool and FolksFest if you wish to discuss this topic with me personally, and I am also available to consult with artists, managers and agents on planning, booking and executing international tours, as well as other matters connected with career development for performers and songwriters. If you'd like to learn more, email me at mike@chicagomike.com or call / text me at +1 312 420 5306.

I wish you an amazing SongSchool!!!! I hope to see you at my International Touring workshop on Wednesday at 4:15pm on August 14th.

Kind regards,

"Chicago" Mike Beck