

## Beneath The Surface with...

Steven Dobbins,  
North America & Europe Associate



Bartelings' Marketing Manager, Samantha Hannay chats with travel expert **Steven Dobbins**. Currently living in Germany, Steven is Bartelings' Associate for North America and Europe, his specialisms in private and luxury travel pairing perfectly with Bartelings' partners around the Globe. Here we find out what brought Steven and Bartelings together and delve into his travel know-how so far.

**Bartelings:** *How did you first meet Gary and decide to join Bartelings as an Associate?*

**Steven:** I met Gary for the first time 10 years ago at Victoria Station in London when we were both working for different travel companies trying to establish a project together. We instantly bonded and a few years later the opportunity came up to join Bartelings as Associate which has been a fantastic experience so far!

**Bartelings:** *You've travelled extensively around the Southern Hemisphere. How did that help you move into the travel industry and build it into a profession?*

**Steven:** I took a Sabbatical almost 20 years ago which took me to South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The experiences, especially with the amazing people I met travelling, convinced me to make a career change from a corporate career in Market Research to starting from scratch in the travel industry. Luckily, a neighbour of mine in my home city of Berlin, happened to run a tour operator specialising in off-the-beaten track bespoke rail travel. That was the beginning of a travel love affair for me!

**Bartelings:** *You cover North America and Europe for Bartelings. How does this reflect in your travel experience?*

**Steven:** North America is my second home, in particular California as my late father was born and raised there. Having grown up myself in Germany I try to blend the best of both worlds in my daily work and life, pairing German efficiency with American 'can-do' spirit. I've travelled a lot on both

continents, my favourite state being California in the US, and in Europe particularly enjoying short trips to London, the Scandinavian capitals and the Spanish islands of Mallorca and Ibiza.

**Bartelings:** *What are your top 3 tips for travellers venturing to these regions?*

**Steven:** Don't stick to a rigid plan but break out left and right. There is so much more to be seen and explored off the paths most wandered!

An incredible experience doesn't have to cost much and be prepared to experience beauty in the odd! Try some local food you've never imagined tasting in your life – be daring!

**Bartelings:** *I myself lived and travelled around North America for 4 years. It's such a diverse part of the world with so much to see. What have been your favourite places to visit so far?*

**Steven:** I love the laid-back feeling of Southern California and the coastline is incredible. I can highly recommend taking coastal Highway 1 north of San Francisco and enjoy the remote coastal towns of Oregon with their breath-taking vistas as well.

Everyone who has experienced Manhattan or the Hamptons should also head out north along the Hudson River Valley. It is so tranquil, peaceful and unpretentious there.



Driving from Miami to Key West is a must, too, not only witnessing the Ernest Hemingway House but seeing the building where one of the most iconic airlines of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was founded – Pan American World Airways fondly known as Pan Am.

Surprisingly different than expected, the state of Michigan is well worth a visit. With Motor City Detroit as one unique urban extreme; to the other extreme having access to four Great Lakes. One of the highlights here being picturesque Mackinaw Island, with its beautiful horse-drawn carriages and maximum 1-2 Horse-power driving policy on the island.

**Bartelings:** *In your travels have you ever found yourself in a sticky situation? What did you do to get yourself out of it?*

**Steven:** Several! Mother nature can often have a huge impact on travel plans. I've been stuck in Eastern Siberia on a military airport base due to fog at my intended destination. On two other occasions, we couldn't fly out of Tokyo due to volcanic activity in Iceland, and when travelling across East Asia, we had to take a 20-hour bus ride through the Gobi Desert from Beijing to Inner Mongolia as sandstorms prevented air travel. Airline delays are common and I learned to adapt an "It is what it

is” mentality due to these experiences. Some things are beyond your control, but there will always be a plan B, it just might take a little longer to get to your destination!

*Bartelings: There are obviously the ‘go-to’ destinations in Europe for many travellers but where would you recommend for something a little different? Do you have any hidden gems to share with us?*

**Steven:** Sure – Tallinn in Estonia is one of the most under-rated capitals in my opinion. It has this unique Baltic and Scandinavian blend of influences with a Slavic twist to it, too.

Cruising into the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro, arguably boasts one of the most impressive fjord-like cruise experiences in all of Europe.

Visiting the capital of icebergs in Illulisat, Greenland, is one of the most immersive experiences I have found so far travelling.



*Bartelings: How have you seen the face of travel change over the last 10 years or so?*

**Steven:** For sure the arrival of the Chinese Traveller has been the greatest change in Global Travel over the past 10 years. If prior to the Pandemic, Germans were recognised as the travel world champions for most trips taken per year and Americans as the spending world champions in regard to average spend per trip, the arrival of the Chinese traveller certainly has taken both categories to a new level.

From a destination perspective certainly the ‘cold’ destinations have gained significantly in importance, that specifically being Iceland, Greenland and Svalbard in the Northern Hemisphere and Patagonia and Antarctica in the Southern Hemisphere. Personally, some of my most favourite destinations as well!

Special interest travel in small groups has also been on the rise – may that be a special food, music, sports or lifestyle theme. At Bartelings, themed travel is certainly an area we enjoy exploring as it lends itself to such creativity. We have designed and curated air cruises with an historic, commemorative



theme like WWI/II tours, Classic and Sports-car fuelled theme-like trips, giving guests the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Northern Lights or Solar/Lunar Eclipse viewing.

In regard to type of travel, not only have highly acknowledged ocean and river cruises grown significantly in acceptance among travellers in the last decade, but also less known bespoke rail and private jet travel has been heavily on the rise. People are looking for extraordinary, unique and unusual experiences, may that be on water, rail or in the air.

As much as Individual or solo travel has taken an upturn, small group travel is also proving highly popular, giving the discerning traveller the opportunity to bond and mingle with like-minded travellers.

*Bartelings: What do you think travellers are looking for from their travel experiences today, particularly after lockdown and the pandemic?*

**Steven:** Safe experiences with hassle-free operating procedures will be the key to satisfy the traveller moving forward - enhanced sanitation and hygiene protocols are here to stay.

There will be a renaissance of the travel agent after the pandemic as they proved vital during lockdown, particularly helping clients when things don't go the way they want them to.

Personal travel insurance is on the rise as well, especially for treatment outside the home country.

*Bartelings: And finally, what is the one place you have always wanted to visit but not made it to yet?*

**Steven:** New Year's in St Barths in the Caribbean. I would love to dive into the lifestyle of the rich and famous for one-time only – so for sure, booking a return ticket, ideally on a private jet!

