

PLAYBOOK

Luxury Travel & Bespoke Safaris

Handshake Outreach email sequence, adapted.

Four messages, one sequence. Mail-merge ready.

ADAPTATION 13

Category notes

Luxury travel is a trust-intensive purchase where the product is invisible until the moment it's consumed. The buyer is spending \$10,000 to \$50,000+ on an experience designed by someone they've never met, in a place they've never been, months before departure. The research phase is long — often 6 to 12 months of comparing itineraries, reading trip reports, watching destination videos, and lurking on sites before ever reaching out. The temptation for travel companies is to lead with aspiration and photography. Resist. At this price point, the buyer already knows they want to go. What they're really deciding is who to trust to design it. The costly signal is specificity: demonstrating that the advisor knows the destination at a level of detail the client can't get from a website, and is willing to talk them out of the wrong trip rather than sell them the most expensive one.

Insider terms: bespoke itinerary, ground operator (the local company that actually runs the logistics on the ground — the most important variable in trip quality and the one clients almost never ask about), shoulder season vs. peak season (and why shoulder is often better), private conservancy (land adjacent to national parks with fewer vehicles and walking safaris), mobile tented camp vs. permanent lodge, internal transfer (the small charter flights between camps — often the most stressful and least-explained part of a safari), travel advisor vs. booking platform, deposit and cancellation structures, trip insurance (and why "cancel for any reason" coverage matters at this price point), ATOL/ABTA bonding (financial protection if a company goes under).

MESSAGE 1 OF 4 / SEND WITHIN 4-24 HOURS

Message 1: The Honest Hello

Acknowledge the cold contact. Cut through the brochure blur. Give one useful insider question.

Subject: A note from [First Name] at [Company] – not a brochure

Hi –

You stopped by [Company]'s site recently. If you're in the early stages of planning a [trip type] trip, you're probably looking at a lot of itineraries right now and they're starting to blur together. I'm not going to add to the noise.

I'm [Name], [role] at [Company]. I've spent [X years/trips] in [destination] – not reading about it, but guiding in it, living in it, building relationships with the camps and operators who actually run things on the ground. That distinction matters more than most travelers realize, and I'll explain why in my next note.

One useful thing for someone in the research phase: before you compare itineraries, ask every company you're considering one question – "Who is your ground operator?" The ground operator is the local company that handles your vehicles, guides, internal flights, and logistics once you're in-country. It's the single biggest factor in trip quality, and most travel companies never name theirs. If a company can't or won't tell you, they're reselling someone else's product at a markup and have limited control over your actual experience. That's fine for a \$2,000 beach holiday. At [\$price range], you deserve to know who's actually running your trip.

I'll send two more notes – short, focused on the things worth knowing before you book with anyone. Easy unsubscribe.

– [Name]

[Direct reply-to, not a booking form]

MESSAGE 2 OF 4 / SEND 3-4 DAYS LATER

Message 2: The Inside Knowledge

The costly signal: tell them the mistake that ruins trips — even if it means a smaller booking.

Subject: The mistake that ruins most first-time [trip type] trips (and it's not the destination)

[Name],

Following up. The most common mistake on a first [trip type] trip isn't choosing the wrong destination. It's choosing the wrong pace.

Most first-time travelers want to see everything. They book four or five camps across two countries in ten days because the itinerary looks spectacular on paper. On the ground, it means an internal flight every two or three days — early morning wake-ups, luggage restrictions, turbulent bush flights in small planes, and arrival at each new camp already tired. By day seven, the experience they were most excited about feels like a chore. I've seen it hundreds of times.

The fix is counterintuitive: fewer camps, more nights per camp, one country. Three camps over ten days — with three nights at each and built-in rest — will give you a deeper, more memorable experience than five camps at two nights each. You'll learn the rhythms of the land. Your guide will learn what you care about. The sightings get better, not worse, as the days accumulate because your guide adjusts to your pace and interests.

Here's the part I'd tell my own family. For a first trip, pick one ecosystem and go deep. If it's East Africa, the Serengeti or the Mara — not both. If it's Southern Africa, the Okavango or Kruger — not both. You can always come back. The travelers who try to do everything in one trip almost always wish they'd done less, better. The travelers who go deep almost always come back.

If you want to see what a well-paced [trip type] itinerary actually looks like — with candid notes on why we chose each camp and what we left out — [link]. No form, no sales call.

— [Name]

MESSAGE 3 OF 4 / SEND 5-7 DAYS LATER

Message 3: The Story

One real client told not to book the dream trip. The right itinerary isn't the biggest one.

Subject: The trip I told a client not to book

[Name],

Wanted to share a story.

About three years ago a couple I'll call the Martins contacted us about a three-week anniversary trip: ten days in Tanzania, a week in Botswana, and a few days in Cape Town. Budget of around \$45,000. On paper, it was a dream itinerary. Every destination was world-class. The camps they'd picked from Instagram were stunning.

I told them not to book it. Not because the destinations were wrong, but because of something they'd mentioned in passing: the wife had a serious back condition that made small-plane flights painful after about forty minutes. Their itinerary required seven internal flights, three of them over an hour. Nobody at the two other companies they'd been talking to had asked about physical limitations. They'd just priced the dream.

We redesigned the trip around two camps in Northern Tanzania, both accessible by a single short flight from Arusha, with a three-day break at a lodge with a proper spa between safari segments. Total flights: two, both under thirty-five minutes. We cut the budget by almost \$15,000. Mrs. Martin told me afterward it was the best trip of her life – not despite the smaller scope, but because of it. She was never in pain, never rushed, and spent enough time in one place to see a leopard with cubs three times.

I'm sharing this because in luxury travel, the advisor's job isn't to give you the most spectacular itinerary. It's to give you the right one. And the right one requires asking questions that have nothing to do with destinations – questions about health, pace, what you're afraid of, what you'd regret missing, and what would ruin the trip if it went wrong.

If you want to have that kind of conversation – no pitch, no commitment – reply or call [number]. One more note and I'll leave you alone.

– [Name]

MESSAGE 4 OF 4 / SEND 5-7 DAYS LATER

Message 4: The Clean Close

Three options. The exit is graceful. The questions are theirs to use — with anyone.

Subject: Last note from me

[Name],

Last email unless you want to stay in touch. Three options:

If you're ready to plan: Reply with the destination and the rough dates, and we'll set up a call. The first conversation is about you — pace, health, interests, fears, budget — not about selling you camps. If we don't think we're the right fit for what you're planning, we'll tell you and point you to someone who is.

If you want to keep exploring: [Company] publishes a [monthly/quarterly] destination brief — not glamour photography, but real intel: which camps changed management this year, which seasons are shifting due to climate patterns, which routes are overcrowded and which alternatives we're recommending instead. [link] to subscribe.

If [Company] isn't the right fit: Whoever you book with, four questions will protect your investment: (1) Who is your ground operator, and how long have you worked with them? (2) What happens if a camp cancels or a flight is disrupted — do you have on-the-ground support or am I on my own? (3) What does your cancellation policy actually cover, and do you recommend "cancel for any reason" trip insurance? (4) Have you personally been to the camps you're recommending, and when was your last visit? If an advisor can't answer all four without checking, they're selling, not designing.

Either way, I hope the trip is everything you're imagining.

— [Name]

How to ship this

- **Replace the brackets.** [Company], [Name], [role], [number], [link], [trip type] — every placeholder filled, nothing left in template form.
- **Pick a real travel designer or advisor as the sender.** Not a booking agent. Use a real direct reply-to from the actual designer, not a reservations queue.
- **Render the body as plain text.** HTML email part, slightly large font (~16-17px), warmer-than-white background. Looks typed. Reads typed. People scan plain text differently.
- **Mind the cadence.** Message 1 within 4-24 hours of the visit. Message 2 three to four days later. Message 3 five to seven days after that. Message 4 five to seven days after that. Then stop.
- **Honor the promise.** If you said “last email,” it's the last email. Reactance kills the relationship faster than silence.