

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 34 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Have you tried to find the job you want but it's not working out? Today, Nicole Berry and I talk about that and more when we discuss becoming a study abroad organizer. I wanted to let you know, currently, I am offering free one on one brainstorming sessions, to help you find your location independent path. To book, visit [compasspod.com/brainstorming](https://compasspod.com/brainstorming) and let's get started. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Nicole, welcome to the show.

Nicole: Thank you.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Nicole: Oh, when I was five. You know, I don't think I really knew what I wanted to do, but my best friend wanted to be a doctor, so I thought I wanted to be a doctor like her.

Kathryn: How had that changed by the time you left high school?

Nicole: Well, by the time I left high school it changed significantly. I had very little interest in anything having to do with becoming a doctor and I knew that I wanted to study abroad. I don't think I knew I would be doing what I'm doing now, but at least I, it was closer to that direction. I wanted to keep studying Spanish and pursuing, actually becoming fluent in Spanish rather than just having studied it. So yeah, I knew that. I also knew that I wanted to pursue business. Some of my role models had studied business and so yeah, when I left high school. I knew that I wanted to both study abroad and improve my Spanish, as well as study business.

Kathryn: So it sounds like you pursued college.

Nicole: Yeah, I did.

Kathryn: What did you study?

Nicole: I studied international business with an emphasis in marketing, Spanish, and Western Europe and I ended up adding a minor in German later.

Kathryn: Is there anything from those studies that you use now?

Nicole: Yes, definitely. So part of my degree was a requirement to study abroad in Spain and my company, which I guess I'll get into later, w. We organize programs in the same city where I studied abroad, which is La Coruña, Spain. So that experience, which was part of my college experience, ultimately led to me starting the company that I now run. And then also of course I studied Spanish every semester while within university and then really became fluent in living here in Spain during my study abroad experience. My

company, Linguistic Horizons, we run programs in both Peru and Spain. So of course the Spanish has been very, very helpful. And it, while it was a degree in business, I wouldn't say that the learnings that I took from my classes in business were particularly helpful for learning how to start a business. But I would say there was definitely some theories, especially in the marketing classes that helped me.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Nicole: I started the company while I had another job and I was living in San Francisco at the time and I thought that I would keep both my job in San Francisco as well as doing this kind of on the side. So I didn't really expect to be location independent in the beginning. And I also didn't expect that this would be my full time career. I kind of thought of it as a project in the beginning, but then ultimately I, I thought maybe this could work and if I put all my energy into it, then maybe it can become my full time job. And it, it did. But I guess I would say it was just there, I took kind of a leap to try to dedicate all my time to running the company and seeing it grow. Because it is a travel based company that made me fairly location independent. Most of what I need to do, I can do from wherever I am, in terms of like running the website and social media, answering emails, calls, interviews with students. All of that can be done from wherever I am as long as there's Internet. So I just realized that I didn't need to be paying ridiculous San Francisco rent.

Kathryn: How do you describe your work to people who are just being polite when they ask?

Nicole: I say that I run a study abroad company.

Kathryn: And when they want to know the details?

Nicole: I guess I, I tell them a little bit about the programs that I run. I tell them that I found a need in, in study abroad to focus on foreign language immersion and more authentic experiences abroad. And so I developed a, that first program that we have in the north of Spain in La Coruña, which is an off the beaten path location because it's really great for foreign language learning, I guess Spanish immersion I should say. And then it just kind of developed from there. So I guess I just go into a bit of the story of why I started it, which was about the, the need for more authentic experiences abroad.

Kathryn: Can you tell us a little bit more about how you got started?

Nicole: So I, because I had studied abroad and the, at the university where I now currently work with, for the study abroad program. I had contacts there and I contacted them and I, and I told them, you know, I'd really like to run a summer program. I had a great experience in La Coruña. I would like to make it something that's possible for more students from the US and we're actually open to students from all over the world. But my initial focus was on students from the US giving them an opportunity to go somewhere that's not so common like Madrid or Barcelona or Seville, which are other Spanish destinations where a lot of students, a lot of American students, hundreds or maybe even thousands go every summer and here in La Coruña there's, there's really

just hardly any Americans except for us. So I guess I got started by just reaching out to the university and expressing the interest in developing something in the summer. Then I just kind of went from there. I didn't want to spend too much money because I was leaving my full time job, which meant my full time income. So I had to learn how to build a website and had to learn how to do pretty much everything almost totally on my own.

Kathryn: It sounds like some of your students come through that university. Where did you find other clients?

Nicole: No, actually the students, they don't come through that university. The, so the, the university that I mentioned, they offer Spanish classes for my students that come in the summer and during the semester and they're there, the university here in Spain. So I'm bringing students to them, so they don't, they don't help me with recruitment. How I find students, it's a mix of advertising, social media, word of mouth, my own network, my website, which is probably not a hundred percent SEO optimized, but it does bring us some students directly that way. Posting flyers at universities, connections that I've made with the universities in the US, some of the advisors recommend the students.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Nicole: I don't know which one to tell you about. I don't know which one was first. I mean in the beginning it was hard just to get started. Having to learn how to make a website was, you know, not super easy. I don't know if I'd call it major. I mean it was definitely a challenge having to learn how to do that.

Kathryn: And how about your first major success?

Nicole: I mean, just having students sign up and actually come. Like, you know, you do all the work to set it up and you don't know if after months of recruiting and after months of all the effort that you put into social media and responding to inquiries and organizing the program and all of the negotiations after doing everything, you don't know whether or not students are actually gonna be able to not only be interested because a lot of students are interested, but actually build a follow through, raise the money to be able to afford the flight and the program fee and overcome their fear of traveling abroad, which for a lot of them, it's the first time. But actually just seeing students overcome their own adversities for making it happen and actually following through and coming. So, I mean, I would just say even just my first students, the very first year, every time a student actually applies and comes, enrolls, I should say, that's, I would say that's a success.

Kathryn: If you could start fresh today, knowing everything you already know, is there anything you would do differently?

Nicole: Yeah, there's a lot of things I would do differently. I mean, overall I think that everything that happened, happened because it needed to happen. I don't with it really anything in life. I don't, I don't have regrets. But if I knew everything now, for sure I would do things differently. For example, I was afraid to invest in advertising in the beginning because

obviously, you know, you only have, I only had so much money to keep me going until the company became profitable. And so I was, you know, hesitant to invest when I wasn't sure it would bring a return. But I would say that now that I know that it works, and I know that students sign up, you know, if they, if they hear about it and ultimately enroll, I would have spent more in advertising and recruitment earlier on.

Kathryn: Odds are there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Nicole: Today, for example, I'm sitting in my apartment in Spain in La Coruña. We just wrapped up a summer program a few weeks ago and just received a student who's here for this semester. I am getting ready to travel tomorrow and I'll be traveling for a couple of months. So I'm just kind of wrapping up everything that needs to be done ahead of a long stint of travel and handling emails. I'm also studying a master's so I have to do a little bit of studying. So my, my schedule varies every day. I try to block out say an hour or two for studying and then, you know, blocking out time for calls like this one or calls with students and working a little bit on social media or the website, updating things as deadlines pass. I have to constantly update the website for that. Yeah, it really varies. And then when the, during programs, when I have groups of students, it's a lot of being with them out and about showing them around. So yeah, everyday definitely varies significantly.

Kathryn: How much of your time would you say you spend with the students?

Nicole: Well, they're mostly short term programs. So during the programs I spend quite a lot of time with them. I only talked about our Spain program so far, but we also have a program in Peru. And we also do independent internship placements around Europe. So it varies by program. In Spain, the students are pretty busy with their own activities between Spanish classes and their internships here during their Spanish classes, in their internships, I'm not spending time with them. But I do meet with them when they first arrive, do a welcome orientation, show them around the city, explain everything that they need to know for getting around. And then we meet, I would say about twice a week to either do a cultural activity or a day trip. And in Peru I spend quite a lot more, bit more time with them just organizing everything day to day because it's not that program.

Nicole: Both of those, we actually have two programs. We have an internship program in Peru and a nutrition and natural medicine program in Peru. And those programs require a lot more effort from my side. I now have a Peru program coordinator, so actually she's handling most of that now, but in the first few years it was me and it requires a lot more time, either from me or from the Peru coordinator, whoever's running the program at the time. And then I guess I should say the Europe internship placements, we, we send students on their own independently to go do internships around Europe. So we don't spend, I don't spend time with them directly. I just work with them leading up to the placement and then I'm available for them from a distance while they're abroad.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education, formal or informal?

Nicole: I do, yeah. So I am doing a master of science in holistic nutrition right now I'm doing that online and that is to support my nutrition and natural medicine program that we run in Peru as well as my own, just my own interest and I hope to do more natural medicine and nutrition focused programs in the future. So yeah, I'm working on my studies for that. Just to support that section of the business.

Kathryn: What are you excited about right now in study abroad?

Nicole: I'm enthusiastic about encouraging his many students to go abroad as possible because it opens their perspectives. It opens their mind to new possibilities. There's no way I'd be doing what I'm doing now had I not left the US and traveled abroad to experience different cultures and different ways of living. And I just see the major impact that each student goes through, the major changes that they experience after having spent some time abroad. And so I would say just getting as many students to go abroad as possible for as long as they can. That's what really motivates me and I'm excited about in terms of study abroad, the opportunity for students to, to grow in that way.

Kathryn: Now, it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your income range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Nicole: That's a great question. I don't know because you know, I, I run the, I run the company, it's a single member LLC, meaning I'm the only owner and it's hard to say because you know, the money comes in, but it's not my income. It's, some of it is of course, but I don't pay myself a paycheck for example. So the money comes in and money goes out. I know how to put that into, to, translating that over to a salary. In terms of answering your question. Yes. It's definitely in the five figures and it's not \$12,000. Maybe the first couple of years it was, or actually I didn't even turn a profit. I know I was unde, so I was I don't know, I can't think of the right word. But I was not making a profit for the first couple of years and then it was probably around \$20,000. And then, you know, I'm just throwing numbers out cause I don't remember the exact, but roughly based on my memory around that, nothing for the first couple of years around \$20,000 and then maybe \$40,000. I mean now I'm not at \$100,000. It's under that. But yeah, I would say that's a good estimate.

Kathryn: Where do you see it topping out?

Nicole: Well, I need to grow. I need to hire people because doing everything is exhausting. I love it. But you know, it's not sustainable to be doing this for so long. I mean, I'm running my own website, running my own social media. I do have somebody who now helps me with lead inquiries and she saves my life on a regular basis. But I mean for, for years I was doing almost everything alone and it's just too much for one person. So I would say at, with just me doing most, the majority with the limited help that I have right now, I'm pretty close to where it's going to top out. Like I don't think I would see over \$100,000 the way that it is right now. I would need, I need more people to help me and I need to expand in order for it to see its full potential. So that's something that's hopefully happening in the near future.

Kathryn: And how do you decide your pricing structure?

Nicole: I try to keep it as affordable as I can while still being able to cover, you know, all the expenses and make a profit. So I, I look at what other programs are charging for the similar amount of time. I try to be less than those programs because you know, I'm working with students who are budget conscious. I can't be charging a lot of money and I don't need to be charging, you know, ridiculous amounts. So I try to make it affordable while also still being able to cover unexpected expenses and always stay in line with the budget that I outlined for the program and still have some, enough money to be able to cover whatever unexpected thing could occur. It's kind of an art, it's not really a science.

Kathryn: Is there anything you do to keep your income stable?

Nicole: I can't keep my income super stable because it's not 100% on me to be able to do that. It ultimately comes down to, of course, I can do my best to try to get as many students to successfully come as possible. Do as as I can to optimize recruiting. And that's, that's ultimately how the income comes in. But what I do do is I, I live well below my means. So for example, I don't have an apartment in California because all the money would go into my apartment in California and that's where I'm from. I'm from California. If I were paying rent in California, that would be, I don't know, at least \$1500 if I was lucky, maybe \$2,000 a month. So what I do, that's just an example of one way I keep my expenses down. I have my apartment in Spain costs way less than that and that's just, just keeping my expenses low, I would say is really where, where the trick is, I don't know if I want to call it a trick or the secret or whatever, but that's, that's what I tried to do. Just keep my monthly expenses low because there's going to be months when I don't make money and then there's going to be months when I have to spend more than is coming in. And then there's going to be months where a lot of money comes in at once. So you have to be very careful to not overspend and keep an eye on on expenses and yeah, just keeping rent low, only paying regular monthly things, monthly expenses for things that you're actually gonna use that you actually need.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to get into organizing study abroad programs?

Nicole: You know, I don't know what the right advice is to give to somebody. It's not an easy thing to get into. Initially I was very interested in international education and I thought I'm going to try to get a job in international education. And so I had not worked in international education before that, but I had, you know, my own study abroad experience, my own international internship experience. I had a couple of languages. So I thought, you know, I have the experience that should make me a good potential employee. And then I looked for some companies that I could potentially work for and study abroad and I applied to several positions and I didn't get an interview for any of them. I know that it's a field that's very, very hard to break into because a lot of people want to work in it and there's not a lot of opportunities to work in the field.

Nicole: Yeah. I started that way. It didn't work and then, you know, I just kind of came up with a way to do what I wanted to do on my own and I didn't think of it as a job. So I don't, I don't know how to make generalized advice for somebody that wants to do it because

it's, I didn't really have a plan for it to be what it became. I just kind of took it one step at a time. I couldn't get a job to get experience in it. I didn't try that hard, to be fair. But I, I would say I applied for at least five, five to 10 roles before ultimately just deciding to get a different job and going a different route. But then later I just started this project on the side. I mean, maybe I could recommend that to somebody who wants to get into it to just kind of start it as a project on the side and see how it goes.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Nicole: My next steps are to just optimize everything and make things more efficient and find a way to grow the company.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Nicole: So they can find me, first of all, the website is [linguistichorizons.com](http://linguistichorizons.com) that's linguistic is singular, and then horizons is plural. And then I have my own Instagram, which is, [WhereIsNicole](https://www.instagram.com/WhereIsNicole). The company's Instagram is [lingho](https://www.instagram.com/lingho) with an h, so L. I N. G. H. O underscore abroad. That handles are the same for Twitter and we're also on Facebook, [facebook.com/linguistichorizons](https://www.facebook.com/linguistichorizons).

Kathryn: Nicole, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Nicole: Thank you. I appreciate it.

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