

# A Biography of Alison Tilley

Founder and CEO of Tropical Living



An Unusual & Adventurous Life



Tropical Living™  
An Oasis Online™



Me and My Dad Before Tilley Hats



My Parents in the '70s

### My Passion and My Calling

Everything I have done in my adventurous life to date has led me to create Tropical Living—An Oasis Online. I would like to share the story of my 39 years, my extensive international travels, my family business and entrepreneurial endeavors, so you can understand what inspired me to create Tropical Living and why it is my passion and my calling. Please read my story - it's an interesting one that is well worth a few minutes of your time.

### An Unusual and Adventurous Life

I have been traveling to remote tropical islands since the time I was in my mother's womb. As a young child, I traveled with my family to tropical island nations that were well off the beaten path. While my friends' parents took them to Disneyland for family vacations, my parents chose to charter sailing yachts (with no captains, of course) and explored remote islands in the Caribbean and Central America. I'm certain these early sailing adventures to tropical islands sparked my relentless curiosity and desire to travel.

When I was a young girl growing up in the '70s, my parents were art dealers and very hip. They regularly hosted huge fondue parties with lots of pot, Drambuie, red wine, and artisan cheeses. There was always an array of unusual creative characters around our home: top models, film producers, graphic artists, writers, and ashram hippy types. Growing up amongst these passionate artists and business people was a big part of my early exposure to joyful, creative people enjoying life. I learned to appreciate quality handmade art and the effects it had in our home.

### At Ease in Front of the Camera

I have literally grown up in front of the camera. I was a professional model from age 13 to 16 and during that time, I also took acting, voice and public speaking classes.

### Ship Wrecked on a Tropical Island

At age 14, with money earned from modeling, I paid \$2,000 to be shipwrecked on a beautiful tropical island in the Bahamas with a small group of teenagers. I had heard about an exclusive, organized class adventure called "Shipwreck" and, although I was underage, I was determined to go. I am not sure how, but I was able to persuade my parents to sign the permission slip and off I went to the outer islands of the Bahamas. I was the youngest of a group of 16 teenage kids and we were purposefully shipwrecked on an island for two weeks. Once a day, a bell would ring and our 'chaperones' would hand out our daily rations of white bread, orange cheese, stale raisins and fresh water. That was it. We slept in tents on the beach and went fishing for protein. I couldn't bring myself to kill the fish I caught, but because of my time modeling, I was accustomed to not eating, so survival was easy. I brought a small voice recorder and began making talk tapes on this trip. I now have well over a hundred 90 minutes talk tapes. I realized then it would be a great way to stay in touch with my family and friends while I traveled the world alone over the next number of years.

A highlight of the trip was when two huge bales of marijuana washed ashore on Day 2. We entertained ourselves in the evenings by throwing handfuls of pot on the open fire, leaning in and, yes, inhaling deeply. (Fortunately, the pot smoking was a teenage experience, not a lifestyle I continue today.) I wonder to this day what on earth happened to the chaperones during those evenings of indulgence. This was another adventure that fuelled my lifelong fascination with tropical islands.



Me Modeling at Age 13



A Tropical Island



Starfish with Flowers



Islands in Greece



Changing Life's Direction

### Europe Alone at Age 16

The day after my 16th birthday, I convinced my parents to allow me travel on my own for a second time and left for two months in Europe. Once again I focused my time on islands and kept up the search to find one that would surpass the last. I knew after this solo excursion that I would one day circumnavigate the world alone in search of the world's most beautiful islands.

At 17, I spent several months exploring the islands of the Caribbean, became a certified scuba diver and an admirer of Jacques Cousteau who invented SCUBA. (Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus).

At 18, I graduated with honors from high school and planned to take one year off to travel before going to University to study business. During that sabbatical, however, I successfully deferred my enrollment and became a member of what I now call "The Island Tribe."

### The Monumental Decision that Changed the Direction of My Life

At the age of 19, after 11 months of exploring tropical islands in Southeast Asia, my solo journey was coming to an end. The clock was ticking, time was running out and my heart was heavy. This adventure was supposed to get my desire to travel out of my system but the exact opposite had happened. My love of tropical islands grew and moved through every cell of my body. There was absolutely nothing I could do to stop it — it was simply too late. As I sat on a blinding white beach in Southern Thailand with the sun setting and tears streaming down my face, I made the decision that changed the entire direction of my life.

I ripped up my return plane ticket home.

### My New Life's Mission: Find the Most Beautiful Islands on Earth

After summoning the courage, I phoned my parents in Toronto to inform them that I would not be returning home to Canada for many years. University would just have to wait. I was no longer a tourist; I had become a world traveler. My life was now my own and I had the freedom to design it any way that I wanted. This massive change in direction is what I refer to as a "mid-course correction." It became my mission to find the most beautiful islands on earth.

### Supporting Myself

With less than \$4,000 Canadian at my disposal, I had to figure out a way to support my ongoing travels and fast. Since I could not legally work overseas, it was obvious that I needed to work for myself. My father, Alex Tilley, is a well-known entrepreneur who invented the Tilley Hat and some of the finest travel and adventure clothing in the world. He always encouraged me to be entrepreneurial and design my own life. The time had come.

### Importing Handmade Homeware

Still 19 years old, I moved to Bali, Indonesia, and started my own import/export company that I called "Alison Wonderland". I bought exquisite, handmade homeware in Bali (bed spreads, pillow cases, and sarongs) and sold them at the Camden Lock Market in London, England. I have always appreciated handmade homeware from around the world and enjoy supporting artists and sharing their work with others.

### Trekking with Sir Edmund Hillary

At the age of 20, I had not seen my father for a couple of years and missed him deeply. Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to summit Mt. Everest, invited my Dad and a small group of people to join him on a 10-day trek in The Kingdom of Nepal. For my 21st birthday, my father surprised me with a plane ticket to Nepal and an invitation to join them. It was on this trip that I was inspired to start another company designing and selling knitted sweaters and thick, colorful wool socks.



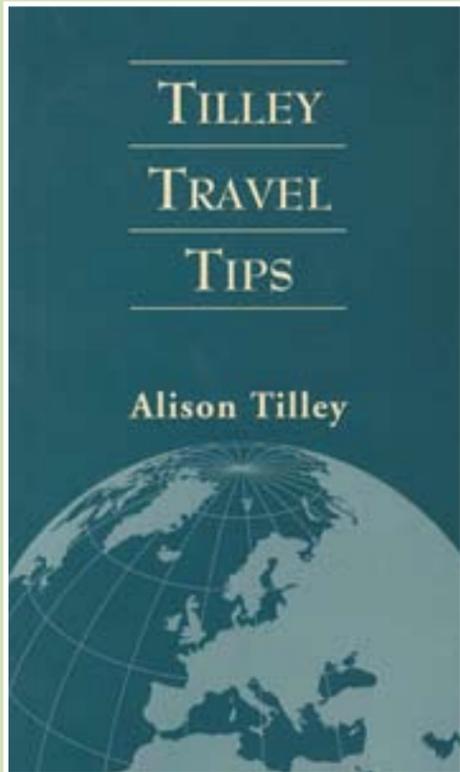
My Life's New Direction



Moving to Bali



Supporting Myself



My First Book

### Living in Kathmandu

So, by the age of 21, I had set up a women's knitting co-op just outside of Kathmandu. Again, I called it Alison Wonderland. Years prior, I had the good fortune of hearing Anita Roddick (founder of The Body Shop) speak and understood how it was possible to run a business and still have a soul. I had 65 employees working for me that I cared about deeply and, in gratitude for their contribution to my company, I am proud to say that I treated and paid them very generously. I encouraged the women to bring their children to work and provided babysitters to make their lives easier. My knitwear was sold internationally in Australia, Canada and Europe and the experience taught me that prosperity for everyone really does work.

### Travel Consulting Business

The following year at age 22, in Perth, Western Australia, my reputation as a tropical island expert was growing. I started a small travel consulting business and a wealthy family hired me to find them a private tropical island to purchase because of my extensive travel experience and my discerning eye.

### Self-Published Travel Tip Book Sells a Staggering 250,000 Copies in 6 Weeks

I have always loved to inspire people to travel to out-of-the-way places and to tropical islands in particular. Still 22, I stopped off in Toronto for three months to visit with my family at our lakefront cottage and wrote a small, pocket-sized book called "Tilley Travel Tips - For Safe, Easy, Worry-Free Traveling." I self-published the book, designed the front and back covers and printed 5,000 copies. I promoted the book to travel agents as a premium incentive product and managed to sell 250,000 copies in less than six weeks, mostly in corporate sales to American Express travel agencies. I then signed a sales and distribution contract with McClelland and Stewart for bookstores and my book became a best seller in Canada. Very few people successfully self-publish a book, and even fewer sell a quarter of a million copies in less than 1,000 hours.

### Losing Sight of My Tropical Life

Although I was only 22 years of age, I was already burnt out and exhausted. I worked non-stop from Bali to Nepal, Perth to London, Toronto to Fiji, and felt the pressure of responsibility. I had over 65 employees working for me in Nepal, 12 employees in Bali and 3 international sales reps who were selling my homeware at markets around the world. My travel consulting company was beginning to take off and, in the course of launching my travel tips book, I had become sought after as an island expert; a familiar face and voice for travel and the tropical lifestyle. I had hired a publicist to help me spread the word about my travels and my travel tips book and it worked. I shared my hard-earned travel expertise and anecdotes with millions of people by appearing on numerous television and radio shows. I was repeatedly asked back by producers to be their "travel expert." I was also asked to host two travel-related television shows, but turned them both down because of the cold locations, minimal pay and stress. For the first time, I understood what real stress and over-stimulation felt like. At 22, I felt as if my life was out of control.

I headed off to the South Pacific Islands for the 5th time for some much-needed rest and rejuvenation. It was time to slow down, reflect and go within. I approached a village chief with Kava root in hand and asked for permission to be dropped off on a remote deserted island in the Vava'u group in the Kingdom of Tonga for 4 days. I reconnected with myself, made talk tapes, wrote lists of how I wanted my life to be and started re-designing my life. I realize now, I was preparing for my next "mid-course correction". I escaped the busyness of the life I had created and began to transform in the seclusion of the tropical environment.



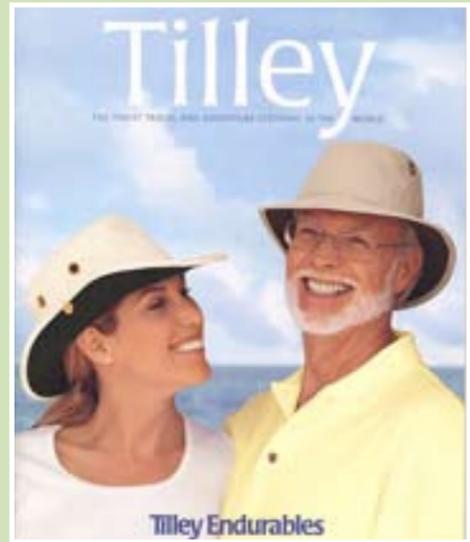
My Tropical Life



Transformed



Searching for Islands



My Dad and I

## Searching for the World's Most Beautiful Tropical Islands

I continued traveling and island hopping all over the world for many years; sailing, scuba diving, beachcombing, writing and researching. Along the way, I met many unique individuals who designed and built their own luxurious dream retreats on tropical islands. Some were private homes, while others were spa villas or island hide-aways. I rented many outstanding properties from the visionaries who created them. The beauty of these homes and island locations would lure me to extend my stay for months on end. I settled on an island in the middle of the Pacific and made it my home.

At the age of 27, I introduced and set up my family's international hat and travel clothing business, Tilley Endurables, in Australia, New Zealand and San Francisco.

## My Family Business Tilley Hats — The Finest Travel and Adventure Clothing in the World

"It happens with alarming frequency... a traveler in some far away land, sporting their Tilley Hat stops a total stranger, also wearing Tilley. There's a knowing look, a nod of recognition and a camaraderie soon forms. Alarming, indeed! It makes us suspect there exists a worldwide "club" of discerning individuals, who recognize each other, not by a secret handshake, but their fine taste in travel clothing." – a quotation from a Tilley catalogue.

By the age of 30, it was time to shake the family tree. I left my island home and spent the next 18 months at the Tilley Endurables headquarters in Toronto where I helped re-structure, re-brand and re-launch my family's hat and clothing company. I then went on a national media tour with my father, Alex, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the business and announce my new role as "Chairman in Training."

Tilley's designs and manufactures some of the finest outdoor hats and travel and adventure clothing in the world. We began over 25 years ago and now have over 265 employees worldwide, 4 family-owned retail stores, a mail order division, an online division ([www.Tilley.com](http://www.Tilley.com))

and our hats and clothes are sold in over 2,100 stores in 19 countries around the world. Our clients include members of four royal families, film stars, rock stars, writers, famous explorers and interesting, affluent men and women who love to travel, appreciate quality and are willing to pay for it. My smiling face along with my dad's is on the hangtag of every Tilley Hat sold and I am the voice of Tilley for all of our radio commercials.

## Re-Designing My Life

While I was in Toronto the words of a wise old man, whom I'd met in Nepal earlier in my travels, came to me. He looked me straight in the eyes and with a soft twinkle said, "Life is just time passing. We must enjoy the time as it passes." It was an exchange that I will always remember.

## This is when I looked at time — for the first time

There are 720 hours in a month (24 hours x 30 days) and 8,760 hours in one year (24 hrs x 365 days). Should I live to be 75 years of age, that's only 332,880 hours remaining, or 13,870 days of being alive. It was time to return to my tropical lifestyle on my tropical island in the Pacific.

Sitting on a beach reflecting on my newfound understanding of how short life really is, I wrote a list of what was important to me. This list, along with many future lists, became a roadmap guiding me toward wiser choices. My lists teach me how and where to invest my time and energy. Written words offer clarity and direction and help weave what's important into life.

I wrote a list and realized that

what I love is tropical living.



The Tilley Hat



Looking at Time



What I Love About Islands



The Bounty of Nature



My True Essence

Here is a portion of my list:

### ‘What I love about islands’

- The raw sensual appeal of nature
- The warm tropical breeze and the taste of sweet, pure air
- The sun shining
- The blinding white sandy beaches
- Discovering seashells
- The lush green mountains and the huge tropical foliage
- The sounds of swaying palm trees
- The coral in the inviting blue waters
- The adorable tropical fish
- The songs of the whales
- Watching the dolphins play
- The gushing waterfalls
- The morning rainbows
- The mixtures of orange and pink at sunrise and sunset
- Ripened papayas and mangoes that hang from the trees
- Fragrances of plumeria and ginger wafting on the trades
- Brightly colored tropical birds singing as they ride the wind

It is more than the natural beauty that draws me to tropical islands — the feeling runs much deeper. Tropical living is an easier, softer way of being. Islands help me remember my true essence and primal instincts. Islands carry the pulse of a slower, more enjoyable lifestyle, barefoot. The gentle, meandering pace is much slower and more relaxed. Stress melts away, providing a sense of calm and inner peace. I get in touch with my natural rhythm and feel less distracted or worried, allowing me to focus on being in the now. Grains of white sand polish the soles of my feet during a leisurely stroll, and my skin always has a hint of a golden glow from the sun. I feel alive and embraced. Time and space opens up for reading, swimming, hiking, laughing and enjoying life’s simplicity. I can see my reflection in the content, peaceful smiling people I encounter while on tropical islands.

I decided, list in hand, to surround and fill my life with the things that I love. It was clear that tropical living was my lifestyle of choice. I always feel happier, healthier and more balanced when on tropical islands.

### Finding the man of my dreams

It was then I found Lenny, a man 10 years my senior, from the San Francisco Bay area, who also loved islands and the tropical lifestyle. We met at a bonfire on a white, sandy beach at sunset. Lenny and I married a year later, barefoot, on a beach. We bought a beautiful piece of land, designed a beautiful home and enjoy our beautiful island lifestyle with our cats, the cows, horses and chickens.

### The Birth of Tropical Living

Two weeks after my 35th birthday, I awoke at 2:37 a.m. I stared at the clock and knew in that moment that my life had changed forever. I could feel it in my bones. A flicker had sparked my passion and had given birth to the concept of Tropical Living.

With all of the islands, villas, spas and tropical homeware I had enjoyed in my life, Tropical Living was the obvious solution. Having been around the world 10 times, I could now share my wealth of travel expertise and extensive rolodex of these hard-to-find havens.

What inspired me was my genuine concern about the speed of life, the lack of leisure time and its effect on people. I had experienced first hand how time on certain tropical islands could transform and rebalance lives in the most wonderful of ways.

I spent the next 4 years creating my online company, TropicalLiving.com-An Oasis Online. It’s an unusual tropical travel, homeware and lifestyle company that advocates slowing down, reconnecting and enjoying more “Leisure in Luxury” on the most beautiful islands in the world.

The time to breathe more deeply into life has arrived. A global movement for a happier, healthier, more balanced life has begun.

I hope you are as exhilarated and as excited as I am.

**Welcome to Tropical Living  
It’s Upscale, that’s Uplifting**



Lenny, the Love of my Life



The Birth of Tropical Living



Welcome to Tropical Living