

Introduction to TRAVEL WRITING & PHOTOGRAPHY



Foreword

A travelling contact tells us every one of his holidays pays for itself. And he jets off several times a year to places as far apart as Hawaii and Adelaide, Disney World and Center Parcs.

His secret is to take his camera and pocket recorder with him wherever he goes. He takes pictures of unusual and rare events, and writes about strange things that happen to him when he's away. And he earns well from his efforts from a wide range of clients, many of whom pay up front to fund his expedition.

Surprisingly, very few writers consider this particular area of their profession; many think they have to be well-travelled themselves to make a good living as a travel writer; others hide their talents under the mistaken assumption that writers must finance their own journeys before they can write and sell their experiences. Not so!

Introduction

Your work will be in demand from a wide section of industry, business and commerce.

Travel articles and features, even snippets, fillers and photographs, sell well to local and national newspapers and magazines, and publishers of travel books and periodicals.

But there are many, many more sources of work available to you. Restaurants, for instance, are interested in menus and features on eating establishments abroad; hotels are on the look-out for much the same information about their foreign rivals; businesses want to know more about their overseas rivals, writers need research data, and so on.

Your target destination will depend heavily on the type of articles you wish to write. Writing general articles for the travel industry and other clients might take you to all corners of the world. Writing on specific subjects, for instance religion or famine in the Third World, will obviously restrict your choice of destinations.

**Always ask a contribution up front for your work
and agree the amount you'll be paid on delivery.
Get as many clients as you can and you could
fund your flights and living expenses, too.**

Make a list of prospects and contact them with your proposals. Send detailed ideas and synopses to those who might feasibly give you an assignment, however small.

Editors and publishers are your most likely clients, alongside travel firms, and others publishing travel guides and newsletters. But don't forget: academics, historians, genealogists, import/export agents, and more besides.

And never make the mistake of seeking purely well-paid assignments: consider all potential money-makers, even the odd few pounds likely to be earned from a simple readers' letter or filler or photograph in your local paper.

Learn as much as possible about your chosen country or group of countries. Contact Embassies, Consulates and government tourist offices. Most addresses will be in the capital. Get details from *Yellow Pages* for major towns and cities and write for further information on the country concerned.

Chambers of Commerce, in your own country, and in the country you intend to visit, are excellent sources of background information. Learn as much as possible about: the people, customs, geography, history, politics, traditions, culture, sport, famous

personalities, transport, national dishes, fashion, health, education, and anything else concerning the country you will be visiting.

First and foremost, always have pen, paper, and if possible a laptop computer and pocket recorder with you at all times. Collect information as you travel; pick up any literature you can lay your hands on; interview interesting characters; photograph them (with their approval); look for unusual subjects and angles to focus on.

Don't start writing proper until you return home; you'll waste valuable research time, and usually you'll see things quite differently when you return. Stick to taking notes and photographs, and looking for even more markets for your work.

When you arrive home, first fulfill your commitments to clients who have paid in advance or otherwise funded your journey. Then consider clients you may have previously overlooked. Continue seeking new clients while your information remains current and remember one trip can be a source of income for many years to come, so continue seeking markets for your material.

Remember, quality of the information you gather is more important than your writing talents. Some clients will not be looking for literary style; others will have your work edited to suit their own specific requirements. This doesn't mean you can cut corners, not if you expect to get future assignments from these people!

Now you've got the drift of this easy money-making idea, let's look at ways for you to become a regular travel writer. The secret is to be different, and that what the next section is all about.

How to Make Your Work Stand Out From the Rest

Dispel a Popular Belief

Look for myths and beliefs which can be challenged and thereby create a truly unusual article for magazines large and small.

For example, the Swiss pride themselves on being one of the world's cleanest nations. Very hefty fines are handed out to litter louts.

At least that's what the outside world thinks - and to be fair it's almost certainly true - but if you find a particularly litter-ridden Swiss location, take photographs, perhaps 'shoot' a litter lout in action - it's another great chance to make the whole world reconsider its views.

Look For New and Interesting Developments

Being one of the first to report on some new and interesting development will find you selling your articles and features many times over.

Changes you might look out for include new leisure and tourist attractions; the removal of long-standing monuments or eyesores; new transport systems, and so on.

Narrow Down the Area

Instead of writing about a place in its entirety, look for a small but interesting part. Most towns and cities, for instance, in our own country and abroad, have areas that most tourists never see.

Shanty towns, slums, ethnic communities with their own special brand of homes and shops, etc.

Look For An Unusual Angle

Look for something peculiar to you to set your work apart from the rest.

If you are a woman who hardly ever goes into pubs alone, how about a daring piece, personally researched, on the chances of a lone woman enjoying a drink unhindered in a male dominated location?

What about researching and writing about life for the liberated European female living and working among orthodox Moslems?

Look for Interesting and Unusual Characters - Focus on Them Rather Than the Locality Itself

Instead of writing about nationals in the country you visit, try seeking out expatriates who have made their homes abroad.

The more unusual their lifestyles, the better. Experienced travel writers take great pains to seek out an unusual character to use as their central theme for a travel-related article. It all adds spice to the finished product.

Look For An Interesting or Unusual Place or Building to Focus On

How about looking for slums and ghettos in the middle of one of the world's most glamorous locations?

A number of places have squalid shanty towns situated virtually yards from the most densely populated tourist areas.

Tourists don't see them of course; they're often hidden from view by large office blocks, walls, trees, and whatever else might shield the nationals' degradation and poverty from wealthy tourists' eyes.

Find them, take notes, shoot a few photographs, and offer your work to numerous worldwide magazines.

It doesn't need to be a region or area you might focus attention on; look for interesting buildings: houses thought to be haunted, for instance; places with an interesting history; a normally quiet town brought rapidly to life at carnival time, and so on. If you can tie in an anniversary, then don't lose the opportunity to do so.

Tips on Illustrating Travel Articles

- Read as much as you can before you go. Get information from tourist boards and travel agents. This way, you'll know the type and style of pictures the travel trade prefers; you can then supply them accordingly. Look out for unusual places, interesting events, popular myths, and so on.
- Check your equipment before you go. It's no fun finding out your camera is faulty once you arrive at your destination; even less so when you don't discover the fact until you get home! If possible, take a spare camera and several rolls of film.
- Remember that not everyone likes being photographed, sometimes for cultural, religious or superstitious reasons. Ask permission first.

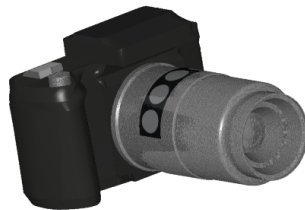
- In some countries it is absolutely forbidden to take photographs of military installations, docks, airports, religious shrines, and numerous other sites. Make sure you know in advance what you are prohibited from photographing. Ask at tourist offices; buy a selection of good travel guides that make this point quite clear. And remember, journalists have lost their lives doing things they shouldn't.

Recommended Reading

How to Be a Five Minute Writer by Avril Harper covers many forms of writing and taking photographs for profit, including readers' letters, fillers, crosswords and puzzles, articles, and more. Information can be found about the book at: www.meanderpress.com

See The Bigger Picture - And Stay Safe!

Even a seemingly innocuous thing like a camera can land you in a whole heap of trouble.



Try taking photographs of a military base in Britain, for instance, and you'll probably get your prints back the very same day.

Try the same stunt somewhere else and you could get the death penalty instead, as happened in 1990 when *Observer* reporter Farzad Bazoft was hanged as a spy in Iraq for working too close to a military encampment!

On a less dramatic note, in *The Trouble With Photography*, published in *The Traveller's Handbook*, photographic journalist David Hodgson confesses that he has been imprisoned three times, always for short intervals, always uncomfortable, and always for:

'Pointing a Lens in the Wrong Direction'.

So how do you decide when to photograph and when to give it a miss?

Before you start shooting:

First and foremost, learn all you can about your destination before you leave home. This applies to most areas where problems can be experienced, photography included. Most travel books, including a useful selection aimed specifically at younger travellers, outline major hazards and pitfalls facing tourists, working travellers and backpackers. Other invaluable sources of information are Consulates and Tourist Commissions for the countries themselves, whose offices are usually in capital cities. Look in Telephone Directories or *The Traveller's Handbook* for the address you need and write or telephone for further information about the country you will be visiting.

Remember that what's intended as an innocent holiday snap can pass as espionage in some countries. Most importantly, avoid photographing military installations, troop movements, airfields and docks. In some places, even photographing factories arouses suspicion. When in doubt, pay a visit to the first tourist office you find at your destination and just ask.

Don't photograph people without their permission, unless you are doing so from a distance and won't be noticed. In some countries, being photographed breaks religious and cultural conventions and, anyway, it's rude not to ask! If you do break this unwritten rule and it turns nasty, hand the film over straight away and make your retreat.

Thank You For Reading!

We hope you enjoy yourself, wherever your travels take you!