

ROAMING THE GLOBE & WRITING ABOUT IT WHAT A FUN WAY TO ENJOY YOUR RETIREMENT

Ah, joy. The cushy life of a travel writer.

Off to glamorous places. Air fare paid. No cost for accommodations. Treated royally. Paid handsomely for all this “suffering.”

That’s the dream, but unfortunately, it’s a bit of a misconception as well. But that shouldn’t stop you. Travel is a major activity of seniors, and retirement writing about it adds a wonderful new dimension. For the first time in the lives of many retirees, they have the freedom to head out on extended vacations with enough time to explore the area thoroughly enough to tell others about it.

That freedom also allows trips to distant parts of the globe. Whether it’s a luxury cruise from Rome to Istanbul, an epicurean visit to the Napa Wine Country or a challenging trek through the rain forests of remote Borneo, travel offers discovery. And discovery makes fascinating stories.

Seeing new cultures and very different parts of the world is wonderful fun, but it does come with a price if you plan to write about what you find. You’re not just on vacation; you are working too. To do it right, you’ll spend long hours researching the destination even before you leave. Much of your time after arrival will be devoted to following up the leads your research uncovered.

But there are delightful rewards as well. You will discover people and places you never dreamed of visiting before. And you will have the satisfaction and joy of telling others about them.

For non-professionals, writing can represent a way to help finance the cost of more and more travel. But, of course, the quality of the articles you turn out will determine whether or not they are saleable. So don’t embark on this route unless you are ready to spend the time and effort required to make your articles worthy of publication.

For most, especially newcomers, the compensation is quite low, usually not enough to cover the cost of the trip. But smart travel writers compensate by sending out their stories to multiple non-competitive publications as you will learn later in this article.

Before You Go

Careful preparation is mandatory if you are to succeed in this specialized field. Once you arrive at the destination, you don’t have the luxury of time to begin your research. Every professional travel writer spends long hours learning all there is to know about the destination he/she’s headed for. I begin researching several months before departure so

when I actually arrive I know exactly where I want to go and what I want to see to develop what I want to write about.

Every destination has its own unique features. They may be physical (superb beaches, challenging hiking trails, remarkable architecture) or cultural (excellent museums, fascinating folklore, unusual customs or costumes). Before you depart, it is essential that you know which of these you want to pursue.

Once there, you'll be able to supplement the knowledge you gained in your research. You'll flesh out what you learned by mingling with locals and meeting with tourism or government officials. Possibly even with local journalists. It's best to plan those formal meetings in advance and book them while you are still at home. Then you can schedule your exploration around them and be certain not to miss an opportunity.

Finding the Unexpected

The real fun of travel is discovering something you never found in your advance research. Often the unexpected provides an entirely new angle to the original piece you planned to do. Or better yet, it may give you a second story to write and market.

Many times these discoveries develop from talking with local folks. Sometimes other tourists comment on a sight or an experience that they enjoyed or found particularly impressive. So mingle, mingle, mingle. Talk to everyone.

Try to find elements that are unfamiliar, distinctive, even strange to the average American reader as you describe the place and the people. Create an in-depth piece that will not only impress a travel editor, but also intrigue his/her readers. Quoting the people you meet (in moderation) humanizes your story, and can help readers imagine they are there with you.

Having Fun

A smart travel writer will divide his/her time between work and play. Most times, the two seem to intermingle. Enjoy the fact that you are in these new surroundings. I try to divide my day into a morning and afternoon segment.

I spend the first four or so hours of the day confirming and expanding what I have researched, completing the interviews I scheduled and concentrating on what it is that forms the essence of the destination.

The afternoons are left for exploration. Wandering about the area, discovering things I never read about, enjoying museums, beaches and whatever else the destination offers. Just having fun. It's during these moments that the unexpected usually surfaces. Keep your eyes and ears wide open so that you can respond to any and every situation that may lead to a new article or a new angle for the piece you had originally planned.

Don't be afraid to let your curiosity run wild. It may have killed the cat in the old aphorism, but it never dulled a travel writer. Be alert to sights, scenes, tastes, smells and describe them all to your reader. They too will help you transport him/her to the places you are describing.

Marketing Your Story

One of the stumbling blocks faced by travel newcomers is the inability to convince a travel publication to give them an assignment in advance. It is mighty tough to break into any of the leading travel magazines even when you submit a superb story.

Newspapers seldom give an advance assignment, but are far easier when it comes to placement. The problem is that newspapers are reducing the size of their travel sections and are very miserly payers. However, it is relatively easy to send your story to a number of non-competitive papers and aggregate a decent return for your work.

Non-Travel Publications

Smart writers recognize that there is a world of opportunity awaiting them from non-travel publications. Stop for a moment and think. Every major newspaper has a weekly food section. Some magazines are devoted exclusively to food; others offer food sections. All of them are delighted to fill their pages with well researched stories on foods and delicacies in foreign countries.

If you are a trained architect, prepare a piece on the unique buildings, homes, palaces, shanties, whatever you find that is characteristic of the area. Perhaps you are an educator. Contact the education offices overseas, visit classrooms, and do a story on some aspect of education that is unique to the destination.

If you have a hobby, contact hobbyists who live in the destination and write a piece for magazines that deal with the subject. Describe the similarities or differences in the way your special interest is pursued elsewhere. As a professional or businessperson, compare operations and techniques in the country you visit with those you and your peers use here in the United States

This broad approach expands your potential market exponentially. So break out the guidebooks, do your homework, pack your bags and discover a brand new way to experience the globe.