

Kickstart Your Life as a Travel Writer

One of the most difficult tasks you face as an aspiring travel writer is getting your first by-line. One "clip" under your belt, and you'll not only have more confidence in approaching editors in the future...but you'll have a calling card to show these editors.

You may think the obvious place to sell a travel article is to a well-known travel magazine. But is it? Glossies such as Conde Nast Traveler and Travel & Leisure are very difficult to break into. In fact, they're not worth approaching without some published clips under your belt.

But look on the newstands, on the Web...in your doctor's waiting room. Thousands of publications are out there – and many run travel articles. They all need copy.

And you don't need an assignment to get published. Many editors will ask you to send in an article 'on spec'. Unless they ask, there is no need to tell them that you have never been published before!

To kickstart your new career, the most important thing is to get published in the first place.

So don't pass up the chance to write articles on subjects other than travel. Any kind of writing is good practise --- and having your byline on an article adds to your professional credibility.

Find the Story

- Keep your ear to the ground.
- Get in touch with your local tourist board/Convention & Visitor Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce. Ask to be put on their press release list.
- Read your local newspaper. What's happening in your town/city/region that could be of interest to a wider audience?

Identify a market for your story

The good news is that lots of smaller travel publications actively seek freelance articles. Remember that **YOU DON'T HAVE TO TRAVEL THE WORLD TO BE A TRAVEL WRITER**. Whatever region you live in, there will be a stack of magazines relating to your own area.

Take Seattle Magazine for example. Undoubtedly very similar in scope and focus to the myriad other regional magazines throughout the U.S. and Canada. 75% of the magazine is freelance written. Payment rates are \$250 - \$1,000. www.seattlemag.com

The writers' guidelines emphasise that they think local: "Pitch regional travel stories. Because people pick up Seattle Magazine to learn more about this city and the surrounding region, we rarely publish travel stories on Mexico, Europe, etc. But our readers do love to take trips within the Northwest, so we're looking for interesting regional travel stories for the upscale traveler that haven't been widely covered elsewhere in the media. We cover the geographic area between B.C. to Portland to Spokane (or a bit further east) to the coast."

Build A Relationship with an Editor

A writer who continuously comes up with good stories...meets deadlines...and produces 'clean' copy (no gaffes or spelling mistakes) is an editor's dream.

Once a story has been accepted, suggest another one. To use a cliché (and always try not to!) strike while the iron is hot. Before long, the editor will start to remember your name: "Oh, that's so-and-so...I know I can rely on her/him to come up with the goods."

Editors often tend to rely on a cadre of good writers that they know and trust. Rather than having to seek assignments, the assignments will start coming to you.

Read and Follow the Writers Guidelines

Before approaching an editor, make sure you know exactly what they are looking for...and whether your idea is a 'match'.

What length should your piece be? Should it be written in first person or third person? Should you query first or submit the finished article?

What kind of 'rights' does it buy? (More on those in a moment).

Also read some sample articles --- many magazines have archived copies online.

Has a similar topic (or the destination) been covered recently? If it has, there isn't much point in you suggesting a story along similar lines.

I've got a Travel Assignment! (Now what?)

Do Your Pre-Trip Research

- Find out as much as possible about your subject (but don't take it as fact that everything on the Internet or in guidebooks is accurate)
- Set up meetings if your story will include interviews
- Draw up an advance plan of action on where to go and what to see
- Does a guidebook or tourism website mention something quirky but not cover it in depth? That's an additional story for you, maybe....
- Maximize your time ...nowhere is a 'one story town'

Identify a Number of Stories to Come Back With

So you're going out of town. But unless your expenses are being paid or you're on a press trip, the check for your one story is often unlikely to cover the costs of actually obtaining that story. Air fare or gas for the car...meals...accommodation: they all add up.

So while you are on the road, your aim is to track down a number of stories. Again, this means doing a fair bit of pre-trip research. While it's unlikely that you'll leave home with 10 commissions for 10 different articles, come back with as many ideas for future articles as possible.

Know and Understand Your 'Rights'... and then Resell Your Story

It's possible to sell the same story an infinite number of times. Effectively it's money for nothing---and who turns down free money?

Let's say your story about a Vietnamese culinary tour is initially purchased by a prestigious travel publication for \$1,800. Great, but why not resell it to some lesser paying markets after its initial print appearance?

When you sell your work to a publication, you are not selling them the manuscript itself. Unless you have signed an agreement granting 'All Rights' or something similar, you are only giving them the license to publish it once.

Once a story has appeared in print (or electronically), professional writers expect 'the Rights' to revert back to the author. You own the copyright and are free to do whatsoever you wish with it. Print out the article and repaper the bottom of your parrot's cage if you must...but reselling it makes far more sense!

Maybe each successive buyer only pays \$50 to \$100 a pop, but you can do the math too. Resell it 10 times for \$100 and in total, you've got \$2,800 for the story---and you haven't needed to change a single word!

Rights issues often seem confusing, but they're straightforward enough. The important thing is ensuring you understand exactly what kind of deal an editor is offering. 'Rights' can sometimes be negotiated. So in your haste to see your name in print, don't blithely sign away what could be an on-going earner.

Many publications buy reprint and one-time rights---just flick through Writers Market and you'll see the possibilities.

First Rights/First North American Serial Rights (FNASR) means you are granting a publication the right to publish your article for the first time. FNASR applies throughout the United States and Canada.

Without a major rewrite (it's normally around 80% of the content to be considered a new article), you can never sell FNASR again. So, be careful whom you sell to! Hook a generous-paying publication to start with, and FNASR is the most lucrative method of selling a story. The door then stays open for selling reprints.

Second Serial (Reprint) Rights -- Here you're granting the right to publish an article that has appeared elsewhere. For example, I originally sold a story about climbing Croagh Patrick, an Irish pilgrimage mountain, to the Washington Post. I resold it a few weeks later to a religious magazine.

Although it sounds misleading, Second Rights can be resold over and over---you're not limited to selling your story twice only. However, expect lower rates for reprints than for original articles. It's also protocol to list where and when the article originally appeared.

Within Writers Guidelines, you may find certain caveats. For example, here's one from Parents Press. "Non-local articles are most often purchased on a second rights (reprint) basis, and we require permanent San Francisco Bay Area/Northern California exclusivity." This 'exclusivity' means that although you can resell your story throughout most parts of North America, you can't sell it in their area again.

Although not a travel publication, articles such as "Working Out With Your Baby," "How Safe Is That Swimming Pool?" and "The Hot New Preschool Approach from Italy" could spark some ideas. They're all past reprints purchased by the magazine. www.parentspress.com

One-Time Rights -- In this case, you're granting a publication the right to use your story once---but not necessarily for the first time or exclusively. You can grant One-Time Rights to more than one editor simultaneously.

You might sell these rights to non-competing newspapers and regional magazines in differing geographical areas. A story about antiquing in Vermont could be sold to publications in New Jersey, Florida, Los Angeles and so on. You could also sell it to 'trade' magazines---doctors, dentists and police officers take vacations too.

As editors also tend to pay lower rates for One-Time Rights, leave investigating this possibility until after selling FNASR to a higher-paying magazine. Clauses may exist here too. For example, Wisconsin Trails magazine buy One-Time Rights that last for 60 days after publication. www.trailsmediagroup.com

First British/Australasian/'Wherever' Serial Rights -- I sold First North American Serial Rights to Horse Illustrated for a story about the Great Fair of Ballinasloe---an Irish horse-fair. With a few spelling tweaks, I then sold this same story to the travel section of the UK's Independent newspaper and also The Age, a Melbourne-based Australian newspaper.

Unless a magazine demands **English Language Periodical Rights**, you can sell a story to other English-speaking countries before or at the same time it appears in North America. Not just countries like the UK either. Anywhere with a large expat presence generally has English-language publications. Travel stories are usually local, but if you've visited somewhere unusual in Thailand, why not try reselling it in Thailand too?

First World Rights/Worldwide Rights -- "We normally buy First World Rights with exclusivity for six months from date of publication" says Cruising World. www.cruisingworld.com So don't try reselling your story on "A Guy in Every Port" to the Irish Independent, The Malta Times or The Bangkok Post---at least not within six months.

Without the word 'First' in the title, **Worldwide Rights** is a bummer similar to All Rights...and I'll get to those in a moment.

Electronic and Archival Rights -- Many print publications also have websites. Terms like these are becoming increasingly common in Writers Guidelines: "We purchase all First North American Serial Rights including first electronic rights and nonexclusive archival rights."

Covering webzines, e-letters, CD-ROMs, etc., Electronic Rights are a whole world unto to themselves. However, you should apply the same principles as to print publications. In other words, don't sell First Electronic Rights (or gift All Rights) to some cyberspace Scrooge.

Archival Rights can be rather nasty. They mean a publication can keep your story in its online database. When a story gets archived, reselling rights can be difficult. If an editor wants to archive your article, ensure it's for a limited period only, and not forever. A "non-exclusive" Archival Right means you can resell the story, providing it doesn't infringe any other rights.

All Rights and Work-For-Hire -- Unless you're handsomely compensated, these aren't good deals for you. When a publication buys All Rights, they're buying your story forever---both print and electronic rights. They can sell it to another publisher or an electronic library...use it in another type of publication...post it all over the web. And you probably won't get paid a cent extra.

If you've sold All Rights, you can try asking for them to revert back to you. However, much depends on the publication---and also its future plans.

Work-For-Hire is even more horrible. Like with All Rights, an article can be resold a zillion times over with no extra compensation for you. The publisher automatically owns the copyright---which means you may not even be credited as author. Plus they can mangle your story however they choose.

The above are the most commonly encountered Rights, but others exist too. If you're unsure of what the Rights being offered mean, ask the editor for clarification. Keep in mind is that some stories can be real money-spinners. So make sure you don't sign away your Rights to getting the most financial mileage out of yours.