Travel Article Templates in Review

The Best -- and Most Marketable -- Story Ideas Are…

1) Specific

Don't send a letter to a publication asking if the editor is interested in a piece about Belize. Instead, ask if he'd be interested in an article about the best jungle lodge or the top spots to invest in real estate or the most economical way to dive.

2) Unique

If you've been reading a lot of travel stories, you'll develop a sense after a few months for what's run-of-the-mill and what's new. Search through travel publications to see what other people have already written about the place you're interested in profiling. This will help you identify the ways your piece will need to be different. (It might be in the audience you target or it might be in the content of your piece.) If you can recommend something your readers just won't read about elsewhere, that's good.

HINT: I've found that one way to keep ideas unique is to think about what the stereotypical view of a place is and write to counter it. If most people know about the diving in the Bahamas, then you write about the hiking trails.

3) Targeted to a Particular Audience

When you target a particular audience with your story idea, it becomes a stronger idea. Here's what I mean: If I were to write to the readers of Walking magazine about St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands, my story would, most likely, be about the trails there – the best walks, the best guide, the best time of year to go, maybe the best "outdoors" hotels to stay in.

That story is specific and it's unique -- at least to the readers of Walking magazine. While you might regularly find stories about St. John in travel publications, it's not run-of-the-mill fare for Walking.

Templates You Can Use to Write Faster and Sell More

Done well, a travel article draws you in and carries you along to its end without you even noticing it has done so. Read a poorly written piece, and you'll find you stumble along, not sure who is doing what or even what you're meant to think about a place.
You can write all sorts of travel articles – a destination article, a special-interest piece, a holiday article, a side-trip piece, a review, a how-to story, the account of a journey, a roundup or a survey -- and various combinations of those.

For each there is a hidden structure…a formula for success.

Below are templates for several of them -- the secret structures that hold various types of articles together. Follow these formulas, and you’ll always write articles that...

- grab a reader’s (or an editor’s) interest
- create an enthusiasm for your subject
- convince your reader that he should “buy” your idea -- whether it’s to dine at a new restaurant, stay in a particular hotel in Paris, go scuba diving in Belize, or trek through the rainforests of Madagascar…

The destination article

A destination article is about a place. Your goal is to entice your reader to go there. How you define your place depends on your audience.

1. Draw your reader in – with a picture or an anecdote
2. Follow up with an opinion, which should be:
   - Targeted to your audience
   - The one thing you want your readers to come away from your piece believing
   - Scaled to fit the size of your argument
3. Prove your point, which you can do by employing:
   - Quotes
   - Numbers
   - Examples
   - Facts
   - Comparisons
4. Wrap it up by echoing your theme…your opinion

**EXERCISE:** Examine this article from The New York Times, July 9, 2006, and pay attention to what's going on in each paragraph. Circle a few things -- where the writer is painting a picture, offering an opinion, and supporting that opinion, etc. And what's the "big idea?" the main theme?


NEXT STOP
Art and Nightlife Have Baden-Baden Percolating Again
By CHARLES RUNNETTE

THE jammed bar and lounge areas are dimly lighted with candles; the D.J. spins an irresistibly danceable
Sasha track, and the flushed, pulsating Prada-clad crowd in their 30's and 40's is having a ball. The scene looks straight out of a well-cast and choreographed liquor ad, and nothing like the fusty image many have of legendary Baden-Baden. But this new club, inside the Bombay Rooms, is indeed in Baden-Baden, the historic and elegant Black Forest spa town that has a not-so-subtle new spark.

"We do a lot with fire here," said Thomas Costal, the club's manager, shouting over the din. "We have fire on the bar, fire eaters, we even serve drinks with fireworks."

After decades of hibernation, Baden-Baden, the Teutonic Monte Carlo, is bubbling back into favor with cultured, carefree visitors — including the English soccer team and their nearly as famous wives, who were based there for the World Cup. Sure, the Versailles-like 18th-century casino still looks as it did when Dostoyevsky lost his shirt researching "The Gambler," and yes, there's something a bit disturbingly old-fashioned about the 125-year-old all-nude Roman-Irish bath, but this place knows something about staging a comeback.

The reappearance of youthful glitterati in this high-priced hamlet that was until recently seen by many as a haunt for surly, stinking-rich septuagenarians is just one more sign that this picturesque valley of the River Oos is becoming chic again. Baden-Baden is determined not to lose its deserved reputation as one of history's exclusive summertime escapes. To its long list of celebrities, artists and aristocrats who have visited — from Queen Victoria to Mark Twain, Marlene Dietrich to Peter Sellers — they can finally add some contemporary names like Bono, President Clinton and the Beckhams.

While many still credit Baden-Baden's enduring popularity to the 211,000 gallons a day of piping hot (as high as 156 degrees Fahrenheit), fabled spring water that has made the town's iterative name famous the world over, one very prominent resident sees a different picture. Frieder Burda, scion of the Burda publishing empire says: "The real secret to Baden-Baden are the friendly people — young and old. We laugh a lot and enjoy life here more than any other place in Germany."

Mr. Burda founded — and financed — the town's latest celebrated attraction, his own Richard Meier designed museum. Built in late 2004 to house Mr. Burda's phenomenal personal modern art collection, the positioning of this small, white, boxy, perfectly proportioned museum adjoins the 100-year-old public Staatliche Kunsthalle (the State Art Museum) on the town's tree-lined, horse-and-buggy-only Lichtentaler Allee. Its positioning is a fitting symbol of the new local ethos: don't overshadow our beloved town's storied past, just figure out subtle ways to improve on it.

Or as Mr. Burda puts it, "Baden-Baden has an ability to connect tradition with the future."

Last week, the Frieder Burda Museum's permanent collection of German Expressionism (Max Beckmann, August Macke), American Abstract Expressionism (Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning), and the post-war German art of Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and the Leipziger School will be mostly put away to make room for its first truly international exhibition. Until Oct. 29, "A New Light on Chagall" brings together 100 pieces of Chagall's best work — on loan from his family; museums in Paris, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nice and Madrid; and several private collections — and helps put Baden-Baden back on the art map.

Like the Burda Museum, the thriving Festspielhaus is another relatively new (1998) internationally acclaimed cultural center in this town of just 35,000. With 2,650 seats, it is one of Europe's largest opera houses, and it has generated a good deal of buzz in just a few years with a diverse but popular line up: from the experimental composer Steve Reich, to the Bolchoi Ballet, to the mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli.

One of this summer's hottest tickets for opera fans around the world is the long-awaited return to Baden-Baden of the Kirov's "Ring of the Nibelung" (July 13 to 18). The Russian production's debut at the Festspielhaus in 2004 received rave reviews, including a piece by critic John Rockwell in this paper calling it, "A 'Ring' to match the four or five most important stagings since the middle of the last century."
The local hotels and restaurants have been kicking it up a notch or two, as well. Brenner's Park, perhaps Germany's top hotel and the temporary home of Posh and the other wives of the English soccer players, boasts a couple of notable enhancements. First, it just received a Michelin star for Andreas Krolik's seafood-heavy menu at the stunning 30-seat Park-Restaurant. And to the Beauty Spa and a staffed medical spa, Brenner's has added a Bulgari spa suite.

The town's other standout hotel is the hilltop hideaway the English soccer team called home during the World Cup, the Schlosshotel Bühlerröhe. Up until now, this fortresslike former Prussian army hospital was mostly known for its fantastic views of the Black Forest, the clubby bar with two giant Van Dyck portraits on the walls, and the Michelin-starred Imperial Restaurant. But as part of the deal to secure the stay of the English team, the once ragged-looking rooms were completely redone, with longer beds, a fresh coat of soothing champagne paint for the walls, plasma screen TV's and new furnishings. Once the cleat marks are cleaned up, the Bühlerröhe may finally be a worthy competitor for Brenner's.

Old school as they are, no trip to Baden-Baden would be complete without a trip to the city's two most famous sights: the dressy casino and not-so-dressy baths. For those who want to try curative spring water (German doctors prescribe visits for patients with arthritis, rheumatism and broken bones) there are two options.

The bold should head for the all-nude (as in no towel, no nothing) unisex Roman-Irish Bath at the Friedrichsbad. Dating back to 1877, this schloss-like, neo-Classical temple to spa culture was built following the plan of the town's original Roman baths with a few newer Irish elements (dry heat rooms and a cold plunge at the end). The three-hour, 16-stage spa process is not for everyone. A little rough and very intense, it's an extreme spa experience.

The first few stages are a thorough cleaning — everyone (don't try to skip one, they're watching) takes numerous showers, sits through sweat chambers, steam chambers and most even get a firm massagebrushdown that seems to designed to remove a few layers of skin. Then comes what can be the slightly awkward moment.

Most days of the week — and even on days when it's supposed to be separate — men and women at the Friedrichsbad meet up for stages 7 through 11 in the gorgeous domed thermal bathing area. The mostly attractive straight and gay couples in their 30's and 40's are very close to each other and the uncoupled few are often shopping around. People who tell you it's not sexually charged are pretty much lying.

Luckily for the modest, the other spa with access to the water, the modern and huge (32,000 square feet) Caracalla Spa, next to Friedrichsbad, requires bathing suits (except in the saunas where they are verboten). The multiple family-friendly spacious indoor and outdoor pools range from a chilly 64 degrees to a sweltering 101. There are also Finnish saunas, outdoor log cabin saunas, a saltwater inhalation room, aroma steam bath and ample room to sunbathe overlooking the town's castle gardens.

The town's other not-to-be missed throwback, the high-stakes Louis XIV-style casino, has its own quirky dress code: jacket and tie for men and formal for women. It's all part of the charm of this, the oldest casino in Europe. With the players in their suits and gowns and the dealers in their tuxedos all surrounded by gold leaf-covered molding, massive crystal chandeliers, priceless Chinese vases, there's a distinctly "Casino Royale" vibe.

Just a few blocks away down Kaiserallee, the retro chic gives way to sexy chic. Stacked one on top of another is the town's current nightlife hub: Max's dance club below and the Bombay Rooms above. Smiling as he watched a guest conga drummer step up onto the bar to entertain the raucous crowd, Bombay's Mr. Costal said, "This may not quite be St.-Tropez, but in Baden-Baden, we know how to have a good time again."
VISITOR INFORMATION

The country code for Germany is 49; dial it before calling any of the numbers below.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Direct trains from Frankfurt Airport, Stuttgart Airport and Paris arrive in the station just outside town. Alternately, the Baden Airpark — between Baden-Baden and Karlsruhe — is served by the discount carrier Ryan Air (www.ryanair.com) with daily flights from Dublin, London, Barcelona, Rome and other cities.

The only time you will need a taxi is to and from the train station because the town is that small and walkable. For general tourist information stop by at the city’s i-Punkt information center (7221-275-200), right next to the Casino. It is closed on Mondays.

WHERE TO STAY

The stately Brenner’s Park (4-6 Schillerstrasse; 7221-9000; www.brenners.com) is arguably one of the best hotels in Germany. The 100 rooms are beautifully furnished with high-quality antiques. Doubles start at 255 euros, $326 at $1.28 to the euro.

For something more modern, try the recently opened Dorint Sofitel Maison Messmer (1 Werderstrasse; 7221-30120; www.dorintresorts.com) built in former summer residence of the kaisers across from the Kurhaus. Doubles start at 195 euros.

A little out of town, the imposing Schlosshotel Bühlerhöhe (1 Schwartzwaldhochstrasse, Bühl; 7226-550; www.buehlerhoehe.com) should be more deserving of its five stars now that the English players have checked out. Doubles start at 250 euros.

The Badischer Hof (47 Lange Strasse; 7221-9340; www.badischer-hof.steigenberger.de) is a former monastery and the only hotel with the town's spring water in its own pools — in fact, it is even piped into some rooms. Doubles from 149 euros.

The Merkur, just off the main square (9 Merkurstrasse; 7221-3030; www.hotel-merkur.com), offers a hearty breakfast with its rooms. Doubles from 92 euros.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

The long-time Michelin star chef Stéphan Bernhard and his wife, Sophie, prepare some of the town's best French food — like fried foie gras and pigeon breast — in their courtyard restaurant, Le Jardin de France (Lichtentalerstrasse 13; 7221-300-7860; www.lejardindefrance.de). Dinner for two with wine is at least 150 euros.

The charmingly old-school Palais Gagarin (Augustaplatz 1, 7221-25838) has German pub food and tall glasses of pilsner served indoors or out. Dinner for two with wine or beer is 60 euros tops.

Medici (Augustaplatz 8; 7221-2006; www.medici.de) attracts visiting celebrities, particularly at its bar.

Late at night, the designer-jeans crowd makes its way to the lively, noisy Bombay Rooms (Kaiserallee 4, 7221-397-437; www.bombayrooms.de), or downstairs to Max's for dancing.

The special-interest article

A variation on a destination piece, a special-interest article deals with a specific activity as it relates to a destination -- gardening in England, cycling in France, alternative healing
in Guatemala, volunteering in Botswana, shopping in Rome, cooking in Spain…

Once again, audience is the key to creating special-interest articles that sell.

Narrow the focus of your article by narrowing your audience. Write an article about shopping for shoppers, a piece on gardens for gardeners, a story on cycling for cyclers. If you’ve done the right research, you’ll find that you can write all three -- about one destination.

**The side-trip article**

Like the special-interest article, the side-trip piece also follows the same formula you’ve already learned -- anecdote, opinion, support, conclusion. The side-trip is simply another way of slicing the destination pie.

Just as a special-interest article helps you to narrow your focus, so can a side-trip piece.

- Start in a primary destination – your city, or any city anywhere in the world – and then look out from there. Where could you spend a day or a weekend?
- Or, think about an unusual “take” on your town. Is there a themed, day-long visit you might suggest – an historic walking tour, for example, or a day of free, kid friendly activities…

**The holiday or special-event article**

A holiday or a special event (like a festival or an art exhibit) can give you a great excuse to write about a place.

Again, follow the structure you would for any destination article…but simply focus your attention not on the destination generally but on what, specifically, the place has to recommend it at holiday or festival time.

Publications often want holiday or special-event articles in hand months ahead of the actual holiday or event. If you’re going to write about an annual arts and crafts fair in Chicago, for example, you’ll want to visit the fair this year so you can write about it in time to find enthusiastic readers just before next year’s event.

**The review article**

A review article is often a fairly short piece – a few hundred to 1,500 words. You’ll see reviews of all sorts of things – in automotive magazines writers review new seats, new engines, the year’s new cars. In food publications the writers review restaurants and new
kitchen products. In electronics magazines, it’s stereo receivers and speakers.

In travel magazines…you might be surprised to see reviews of all of the above. The travel reviews you see most often fall into these categories –
1. A review article about just one item or one place…
2. A review article that’s really a review-survey that compares various products or places…
3. A review article that is really a special-interest destination article and focuses on, say, “The 10 Best Restaurants in Madrid” or “Five Italian B&Bs with Fabulous Views”…

While restaurant reviews in newspapers will sometimes be negative, you’ll rarely see that kind of review in a travel publication. Their readers are looking for ideas about where to go, where to stay, where to eat… they don’t want pages and pages about what not to do.

That said, you should be honest about a place. If you think it's a bit overpriced, say so. If a hotel is fabulous in nearly every way…but you found the hotel food a bit heavy, say as much.

1. Start out with a scene or an anecdote.
2. Tell your reader where he is.
3. Offer specific details about the place.
4. Close with an image or a summary statement.
5. Don’t forget the name and contact information.

NOTE: "Types" of articles overlap

A side-trip piece might be focused on a particular special interest. A review might also be part destination-piece. The story of a journey might also be a side-trip article.

As long as the fundamentals of the structure are still in place, you can play all you want with the “type” of articles you write.

The Easiest Kind of Article to Sell and Resell: The Round-Up

Presentation by Jennifer Stevens

The round-up article

This type of article is not difficult to master once you understand the fundamentals of the destination and journey articles.
A round-up or survey article is nothing more than a collection of short snippets about places linked by a common thread.

You’ll see these articles in just about any publication you pick up –

- 101 Trips for the Best Summer Yet
- The Road to America’s Best Folk Art
- Semiretire! 7 Great Places to Consider
- 15 Top Hotels with Vacation Bang for Your Buck
- 12 Unplugged Islands
- Top 50 Spas in North America

The list is endless. But the fundamentals are the same.

1. Set it up with a summary lead that tells your reader why you’ve put this article together.

2. Follow up by writing short “destination” articles or "review" pieces about each of the places you’re profiling. Most often, you’ll find these destinations separated by subheads.

3. Let the article come to its logical end.

Rather than worry about wrapping-up this type of article, you can simply stop when you’re done. In a round-up or survey article, you set out in the beginning the parameters of your coverage. The reader knows up front how the various pods – the short destination pieces – are linked. You don’t have to sum anything up at the end.