

# Travel Writing Tips

Specialties · By Simon Townsend · 3 min read

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## Travel Writing Tips

I want to say something specifically about travel writing. I also tutor a travel writing course at Thomson.

### First, my best tips:

1. On your travels, always strike up conversations with STRANGERS.
2. Watch what PEOPLE are doing, how they're reacting, and listen-in to what they are saying.
3. Make copious notes.
4. For now, forget the dates, spellings, distances, and so on . . . they're in your guide books, brochures and on the internet to look up later.

Remember: travel writing is NOT for those who will do the travel you are writing about. Travel writing must first and foremost be for armchair travellers and dreamers ? those who will NEVER take the trip. If you write for them, you're also writing for those who are inspired by your article and become motivated to take the same trip. But your "writing duty" is to the dreamers.

Therefore, don't use the horrible term "you". YOU get on a plane, YOU walk here, YOU swim there, when YOU visit this hotel YOU will see this, and then YOU should eat here and YOU will do this and YOU will do that.

Who is YOU supposed to be? The reader? The reader has no intention of doing all these actions that YOU THE WRITER DID. The reader wants to know what the writer did, what happened to the writer and how the writer felt about what happened. Use "I". Or tell of what happened to some other person. Avoid the ugly, illogical, amateur device of talking to the reader as if she must go and do what you did.

## People People People People People People People People People People

Now, importantly: many of my travel writing students do that course and never really understand that good travel writing is about PEOPLE. Interesting travel writing is about what happens to people, what experiences people have and what people feel about what they do. Some articles I receive from students read like boring LISTS.

London is well worth visiting first, and then Liverpool is also an interesting place and also Manchester, Bath, Lands End and Scotland are thoroughly recommended.

Placenames! In this stale style of writing there are no actions. And nothing happens to people. No one speaks. Good writing is about anecdotes, happenings and quotes. I recommend you read travel magazines and the travel sections of the weekend newspapers to discover the kind of writing that gets published. (Yes, I realise some pretty awful travel writing gets published.) Particularly, read Susan Kurosawa in the "Review" pull-out in The Weekend Australian. Now HERE'S a professional travel writer!

There's another dreary style of travel writing that I see. The writer goes on and on and on LISTING restaurants, cafes, tourist attractions, sporting facilities, walking tracks, lookouts, pools, parks, beaches . . . on and on . . . y-a--w---n . . . Endless lists of THINGS and still, nothing happens to people. It's easy to read between the lines and realise the student has never been to any of these places, but got all the names from a map or tourist brochure, and while unwilling to experience them himself, has no hesitation in recommending them to readers. Gosh it's boring to read. If I want a list of THINGS I might find in Broome, WA, I'll contact the Broome Tourist Authority and ask for brochures and pamphlets that list everything. But when I read an article about Broome, I don't want to know every intricate detail of everything. I simply want to know what this

particular writer experienced when she/he visited Broome.

I don't want to know there's Chinese and Thai restaurants somewhere. So what? There's Irish pubs and karaoke bars everywhere you go, plus KFCs and Burger Kings everywhere. Does any reader really care whether there's a McDonald's in some location? What a reader wants is to know is the writer's experience of ONE restaurant (good or bad). A reader wants to be entertained and vicariously enjoy (or suffer) some of the experiences you enjoyed or suffered on your travels.

No travel goes without a hitch, yet many new travel writers create articles that seem like extended media releases in which everything is 101% perfect.

And as G K Chesterton once said: "An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered."

Travel incidents, muck-ups and events that go wrong can be interesting, and you owe your readers the warnings you would give to your friends. You're a journalist, not a PR person. If you'd like proof of what I've written above, ask me for "Hilary Doling article" (that title exactly) and by email only .

**Ends**

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