



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Research on the Road and Find Salable Ideas While Traveling

This week we are going to talk about how to research on the road and find salable ideas while traveling. I want to talk about this because I have been getting some questions recently about exactly this topic, but often in different ways. When people come to our retreats or do a class like the Pitchapalooza class I ask them to prepare in advance a list of trips that they have gone on recently, so we that could go through and pull out ideas. I often find that while many of you guys are traveling a lot and some of you don't travel so much now, but have traveled a lot in your past. You're not necessarily always super on point about how to pull the salable magazine ideas out of there. Maybe it's because you have your own blog and you're used to looking at your trips through the lens of what would work for your readers, as opposed to what would work for magazine readers, or just because you're just new to the game.

Specifically, I want to start with what I just mentioned. How to avoid coming home from a trip and realizing you don't have many good ideas to pitch. You probably do, and you just don't know what they are. But, I have seen a lot of people have this feeling. We're going to talk about specifically how to look at the experiences you're having on a trip through the lens of some different types of ideas, different types of article concepts, article formats, so that as you're out there, you're retraining your eyes to see magazine ideas. Not just to see things that are interesting, experiences, or things like that. But, how to specifically look at your trips through the eyes and mindset of what a magazine editor would be looking for. Also, I am going to talk about my favorite hacks for finding stories on the road.

These are some techniques that you can use when you're on your own or if you're on press trips. Just lots of little ways to ferret out interesting story ideas.

Before we start talking about how to research on the road, I want to look at why people get tripped up? Why are people coming back from their trips with ideas that they're real excited about, but upon further examination they realize wouldn't work for the types of things they are looking to be pitching.

For a second let's forget the elusive idea of what story is and let's think more just about ideas. The ideas that I typically see fall into one of two categories. Either they are too vague, or too narrow. If you have come back from a trip and feel like you had some ideas, but then upon further examination, you thought "Oh I just don't know who would possibly buy this" or "I think this is great, but I just don't know what to do with this idea." Once you've gotten home and it is too late to go back and get more information about it. Ideas that are too vague tend to fall into the category of something that is an itinerary. A lot of people want to do a forty-eight hour & style piece, and there's just not a lot of markets for those. For instance, something that



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seems like a list of interesting things that isn't quite an itinerary. It is more of a type of thing that you would send in an e-mail to your friend about what you did on your trip.

The thing about ideas that are too vague is they often end up having a sort of encyclopedic approach. For instance, you might say "Oh my idea is this festival," and when I ask you about it, you just tell all the things about the festival. You're not telling me what is new about it, otherwise has a time peg, and what is the clear interest in this festival for a reader. Often when you have an idea that is too vague it is because your idea is more in terms of a topic and all the things about the topic. As opposed to narrowing the things about the topic that can fit into a magazine idea. The reason we are going to look at different magazine formats later in the call is that looking at your idea through that lens of exactly the framework that a magazine will publish it in can help you step away from this encyclopedic approach. To looking just for the information, you need for your article idea not necessarily the entire history of the American incursion onto Chichijima island in Japan.

The opposite of this is when ideas are too narrow. If your ideas are too narrow and it sounds like someone over here in the chat box has a similar issue to this. What you might find is that your idea seems very interesting. There's something there that interest you, interest people that you tell about it, and things like this. But, it's not something that a national magazine or even a major regional magazine can publish because it is only going to be of interest to a small subset of their readers. This typically happens when you fail to pull out something that is universal and in terms of a trend or a message from this smaller instance.

This is something else that we are going to look at later in the call. I often find that the very higher up or well-known travel writers everything they write no matter what the topic, format, or venue has a sense of universality to it. You can say this about fiction, and you can say this about anything, but particularly in travel writing that's the bar that you cross to become not just a great writer, but a writer that becomes published very easily. As your looking at things on your trip you always want to be looking not just what interest you about something, but how it relates not just to other people who might be reading the magazine, but how it relates to things that are going on in the world. Whether that's something or the news peg-like Trumpism or something like that, it can be something more general such as how people relate to one another, families, any of these universal touch points you can take to elevate something that might be too narrow and make it have a broader appeal.

The issue also with these ideas that are too narrow is that you might be able to publish it in a magazine that is very closely aligned with the topic, but when you go to super niche publications, you're going to get less money or no money. They are



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just smaller they have smaller writing budgets. So, what I always recommend in this case is if you have something that's super niche in this way in terms of the idea we're going to look at some different formats that you can pitch it through to get it into a bigger publication. Then you can take it back and use the more I don't want to say encyclopedic, but use a longer deeper dive into this specific topic type article for a very niche publication where the readers would be interested in such a thing.

Something about idea generation that I have found is that the more you learn about how to come up with ideas for your travel articles the more, you work through these stages that I call the stages of **Idea Generation Grief**. They don't match to the real stages of grief, but the idea is that when you first start learning more about how to put together travel pitches, what magazine editors are looking for, and these things. You have this feeling at the beginning like "Oh my God I can't use any of these ideas there all horrible," or "I went on this trip, and I thought I could write all these things about it, but now I sit down, and there are no ideas I didn't do enough research." Or "I didn't research the right things," and you just have this sense of malaise or depression that you can't write about any of these things. But, we'll get over that in a minute. In this first phase, you might even feel like now on this call, or you felt like this in the past. You are kind of hit by the sense that you're not doing this right.

The next stage you are going to get to is you're going to get to a place where when you see it you know you've stumbled across a totally killer idea that a magazine editor will be interested in. That comes from not just having pitched editors and knowing what editors will respond too, but you can also hack that and do it more quickly by reading very widely on your own by reading magazines. This is how you can get a sense of what editors are looking for without even having been pitching and getting responses from editors. You see in action the kind of stuff they published, and that is how you're going to know you're on the road. When you start to say like "This is exactly the right fit for *blah* section and *blah* magazine." After you get to that point when you see an idea you know, it's a fit or you know it's a winning idea. You're going to get to the point where you realize how you can take every trip you've been on in the past year or last 20 years and make tons and tons of different stories from that. This particularly works with essays and narrative features, and we're going to get to those in the next section as well. Let's find ways to get to those higher levels the later stages of idea generation grief.

There are tons of ideas, and there are tons of ways you can slant every idea for different audiences and to different things. But, there's only so many ways format wise to present an idea in the austerities of a magazine.



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There's a lot of P's in here I noticed or at least there are two P's in here at the beginning. But, we start with profiles. I am going to go through each of these in more detail. But, profiles and interviews are going to be two different types of things. The profile is the answer to a lot of ideas that you guys are coming up with that you don't quite know where to place. For instance, a restaurant that is doing something interesting, but isn't new enough to be pitched to something new and then were going to look at some different types of short pieces. A postcard is sort of a mini version of a feature, but it has some different characteristics. We're going to look at how you identify something on your trip that could be a post card and how you put that together. A narrative feature, of course, is sort of the golden goose that we all chase after and I'll talk about how to look for different things on your trip that feed into those. Service pieces or anything how to. Those have become a bit harder to do today and I'll talk about why. But, I will talk about ways that you can still find things during your trip that will allow you to pitch those to editors. Round ups are also typically shorter pieces where you take several different things that are related, and we'll talk about some different ways to come up with those. The last one here the news brief and the short are slightly different. These are really the things that you want to focus on. I have one question over here on tips for article research. Later, in the call, I am going to talk about my favorite hacks for doing research on the road.

I do recommend a mix of researching in advance of your trip as well as on the road, and I'll look at some different ways to do that in a little bit. But, I think one of the ways that can elevate you out of those ideas that are too broad is certainly research things that are on your trip. So, when you get on the ground you already have information and already know how the Japanese tea ceremony works. So, that when you go to a Japanese tea ceremony, you don't just think "Wow this Japanese tea ceremony is so cool." You're looking for the certain things that would make it into an article rather than an encyclopedia piece so, I will look at that later in the call as well. Let's talk about the news brief. For something to qualify as a news brief, there needs to be something legitimately new that seems clear.

But, the thing is I have a lot of people coming and telling me "Oh I found this thing it's new," and I ask, "When it's from?" They say, "a couple of years." So, for magazines that does not count. A couple of years doesn't count and in some cases, not even a couple of months even count. I will essentially gauge it this way the larger the magazine the closer to the second the thing has opened you need your new things to be. So, if a magazine is a less regional magazine or a niche magazine in terms of the topic those things don't need to be as new. But, if you're looking to pitching an airline magazine, a national magazine, a major regional magazine, like a Midwest Living, or Southern Living things that are new need to be hitting the magazine pages the month they come out or the month before they come out. What that means is if you want to be publishing things that are new, if you want to see



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things on your trip and then pitch it to a magazine as a news brief. What you need to be looking for is things that aren't new yet as in they are not open yet and they haven't happened yet. There's ways to do this. One of the easiest ways is to work with star people because they're the ones who know what's coming down the line. They have their own purpose they want to get press releasing before they come out.

If you manage to snag information about something that isn't widely available it totally benefits you. Then you can go to a magazine editor and say "Hey I have exclusive information on this historic home that is being turned into a venue for a wedding run by this two people with a very interesting back story. Would you be interested in it for destination weddings and honeymoons?" This is the kind of thing where you certainly need to be doing a bit of research in advance of the things that you are primarily going to find on the ground. I always recommend to people that I coach. When you go somewhere especially if you are going to be there for a while you want to be very familiar. I like to do it in person because having already been there for perhaps twelve hours or over twenty-four hours or something and having thought about what I am going to be researching when I am in the destination. To go to the CBB person with that very specific background in mind because otherwise what happens is when you talk to the tourism more they're going to be telling you from the blank slate of what they want to cover, the little that they may know about you, and what they think you might be interested in.

The more information you can give them about what you're looking for, the more they'll be able to shunt you towards, for instance, the urban distillery that is making whiskey out of honey that's collected on the roof of the convention center. These are the things that they might not necessarily have on their website for you to find in advance but, if you go and meet with someone at the tourism board about specifically the types of things you are looking for. It's their job to come up with these things for you. I have often found that when I talk to CBB people in this way that they're going to tell me about the things that they like to do as a person, as an individual that are quite interesting. They would have not necessarily thought to tell me about otherwise, but those are the really great things to hear. If you don't have the time or the inclination to stop into the tourism board, you can also find these on your own by looking around for coming soon signs and ease dropping. This is something that we are going to talk about later when we talk about my favorite hacks.

Another thing that we talk about a lot is round – up. I often call them basket of kittens and if you have not heard this before we like the term baskets of kittens because it reminds you that the round-up shouldn't just be a bunch of things around a theme. Each different thing in that round-up or that basket should be just as adorable as the one next to it. They should all be great, shiny, and interesting. The kittens shouldn't



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be mixed up with stuffed kittens. You want to have all real kittens in your basket. The thing with round-up's is that I often have people come back from trips and tell me "I found this thing it is really cool." I look at it and I am like well "I think it might be hard to do an article about that, but if we look for some more things that are like that?" For instance, I went to The Treehouse Hotel in Sweden. Architecturally it is very cool and when it came out it received tons of press about it, but it is not new enough to just write up on that. So, you can sort of do a stay review, but again it is not super new, so how can you tackle something like that? You can do a round up on treehouse hotels around the world, a round-up on high design hotels around the world, or architecturally significant boutique and luxurious hotels in very hard to reach places.

You can often find one thing on your trip which in itself is interesting but would be hard to pitch because it has been around for a while or it is in a hard to reach a place. You can use that as the cornerstone in looking up other things that are like it and write a round-up about it. Another rule that sort of goes around in journalism is the concept of three is a trend. So, if you are in a city that has not had a big exeat movement and you are just walking around thinking that you are in this very off Eden path destination. Then you see three places. The first place is a clear indicator for visitors like a juice bar and then you see a hipster barbershop now you have seen two. Now what that means is that you want to keep your eyes peeled for the third thing of this variety. You have got your juice bar, barber shop, and maybe now you are going to look for a yoga studio. Then you can pitch a trend piece as a round-up about how this destination is becoming a hot bed for a polite way of saying hipster travelers. Then you'll include these three places that you have found and you'll probably end up digging up some more. You can certainly start to research this stuff at home by looking at press releases on tourism sites, or on travel media.

The difference between looking for press releases on a tourism board site or on a wider site like PR board or travel media is that on the tourism board site there are going to be various levels of depth. So, if you are in a destination that is not a major city then you're going to find all sorts of stuff on the website which is perhaps a bit boring. It is a little too much like digging up local news. However, if you are looking at the tourism board website of a major city you're probably going to find that the stuff that they are publishing is only the high-level stuff. They are publishing hotel openings, festivals, and things like this. But, what you really want to know about is that urban distillery that is making whiskey from the honey of bees that they collect on top of the convention center.

Those are the types of things that might be a little too small to show up on the tourism board's website in terms of press releases. However, you can often find more press releases about the smaller business's in the destinations that you are



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going to by searching through these other websites particularly travel media which is focused on travel. You also look on PR Web which is more general to dig up some of these things before you leave. Like I mentioned in the last slide about things that are just new. You are often going to find those best when you are on the ground talking to people and we are going to consider some other ways besides just talking to the tourism board to do that later. The thing with round-ups is they are much easier to sell than just profiling one individual business.

Now the things that we have looked at before we looked at the news brief and the round-ups can be classified as short pieces. If you spend time on the travel magazine database or just going through travel magazines on your own. You will notice that most magazines have a good amount of these short pieces. I am constantly amazed by the things that I see like a graphics spent, a walking tour of a neighborhood, or a comparison piece. For instance, Air Canada has something called high-low where they take one destination and then they pick a theme. Then they pick three things that they fit in that theme and then one way to do it on the cheap and one way to do it luxuriously.

You end up with this layout which is very busy because you have six columns, three different things, and then the cheap and expensive way to experience each of them. That is the kind of thing if you do not know about that section in advance when you go to the destination you might find some things that fit into it, but then you come home and be hard pressed to fill those in. We are going to talk specifically more about how to make a pocket magazine cheat sheet later. Particularly for these short front of book sections. All magazines have them and they are all different.

For instance, a few of the European airline magazines that are produced by Ink Global which produces a lot of the airline magazines and we have all their magazines up on the database. They have this neat front of book feature which they call the question of the month. It will be something corksy like what kind of music do Cuban cigar rollers listen too while rolling cigars? Sometimes they are general like why does your cell phone always fall on the screen? These are the types of things that you wouldn't know to look out for those if you didn't already know them. So, if you want to be pitching short pieces and specifically finding them on the road I really recommend taking some time before your trip to familiarize yourself with what sort of short pieces the magazines you want to pitch or the magazines relevant to the destination you are going to are looking for.

Profiles can often end up in this front of book section, they can be a loner, or they can even be features. This really depends on the magazine. The thing with profiles is I have a lot of people coming to me with various ideas that are a restaurant,



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business, or accommodation that is quite interesting, but it's not new enough to do a news brief on. Now to cover these, you typically need to put them into a roundup, which we have already looked at or find a way to turn it into a profile. Opposed to just saying "Hey here is this hotel." Now to do that we want to pull from the business, from the person, from the attraction, or whatever it is some sort of underlining story.

The way to find these to simply ask how something began, why it happened, why it opened, why did it open when it opened, what kind of story do they have, how did it change from how they envisioned it, and has it changed from that to what it is now. Now you don't have to ask all these questions while you are there, but if you find a place that is interesting or a person that is interesting that you want to do a profile of you do need to get the contact information and at least that basic hook of what the profile will be about before you leave. So, when you get home and you go to write up your pitch you have enough information or the phone number and name to get that information to be able to put that together.

Donna has a question over here that I want to address because I think that it is interesting. She says if you e-mail an editor that you are going to a city or destination and ask what shorts they are looking for or have openings for will they just tell you? The answer is primarily no and if you send that e-mail to an editor they are going to not be very happy with you. This circle's back to a quote that I use a lot when talking about pitching. It is the biggest complaint that editors have when people write them and say I am going to "blah" would you like a story? The short answer you should never ever do that. The more specific answer is if you already know an editor then you should do that. This is only with editors that you don't know that you shouldn't just say "Hey I am going to this place would you like a story?" For editors that you don't know you need to be doing the research about what types of short pieces they publish, what destinations they are looking for because it is infrequent that they pick in advance the exact places that they are going to cover and that you would need to know that to pitch. What typically happens is that if they picked the places that are going to be covered in advance they have already assigned that to someone in-house.

The ones that they are looking for freelance pitches for they typically are waiting for ideas to come in from freelancers about what to cover. That is what magazine editors need freelancers for to bring in ideas that they would not have themselves. Otherwise, they would just come up with them and then they would just assign them to freelancers that they already work with. I think that this is an interesting point because a lot of us that are newer really get stuck on the idea of we want to see the editorial calendar and we want to know what the magazines are publishing. It is important to remember that anytime you are on the ground your purpose as a



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freelancer is to bring editors ideas that they do not have back in their offices. Always keep that in mind.

One more question on profiles. When writing profiles on businesses or people it is customary to send a draft to them before sending it to the editor so that they can comment or approve the content? I want to just comment on this as well. Anytime that you are written about somebody they will have a PR person and the PR person will tell you that they want to review the piece. You are never ever to say yes to that without checking with your editor and you should always present that request to your editor in the vein of "So and so asked to review this piece before it went to print I don't know what your policy is on that, but I wanted to check in with you." You do not want to say that you think it is okay or not because with some magazines it depends on the magazine that is frowned upon to show the piece to the person we profiled beforehand. What is okay is to, however, let them check the quotes that you are using, but not the whole piece.

The caveat here is that some small magazines and particularly trade magazines will want to show it to the person because they are interested in the person approving it because they are going to ask the person for an ad. This is a whole other level of relationship between magazine editorial and money. The typical answer here is that you should never show your piece to the person being profiled just on your own. Sometimes the editor will pull your piece if you have done that. If the person has asked you then you should take it back to your editor and ask what the magazines' policy is and do whatever the editor says. If the source is really pushing you about seeing the piece sometimes you just have to put them in touch with your editor. I have had a lot of times when I have had to be very firm about this and I do not think I have had anyone pull out of a piece entirely. This is one way that a profile is different from an interview that we are going to get to now.

With interviews, this is going to be all about quotes. So, this might be a case when they might ask to see it and it might be allowed by the magazine because they want to review the quotes. The thing about interviews is you need to maintain a much closer positive relationship with the person being interviewed and their PR person that keeps them on a leash because without the interviewee you do not have a story.

You can write a profile about a business without the interviews and without the permission of the place that is being profiled. They have no say in whether you write that profile, but you can't do an interview without that person. So, if you are on the ground and you find a person that you want to interview you need to make sure that you get them to say that they are willing to participate in the interview before you go and pitch that piece. Otherwise, that is the very first question that the editor is going



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to write back and ask you. To circle back for a second the way you get people you want to interview it is a little different than finding something for a profile. When we are talking about profiles this is kind of a good bucket for a lot of those places that may seem interesting, but have been around too long to do for a new piece. Interviews are different. For interviews, you need not just a person that has an interesting background story or that has done something interesting, but they often need to have met certain criteria.

This is another reason why it is good to be in step with what magazines are looking for before you go out on your trip because I have seen a lot of magazines lately that want profiles of not famous people, but of people who are just extracts from where the magazine is based in that live somewhere else. Primarily with interviews, they want people who are quite famous or have done something quite important. With these people, they are not necessarily going to be people that just ran into on the street or even people who just run one hotel. They are typically not going to be people that you are able to interface with on your own when you are traveling. This is the area where PR people are often going to offer to put you in touch with famous chefs, big restaurants tours, or other important people from a place and this is one of the reasons why it is very important to make that stop in the tourism board before your trip and for sure write them before you get there. A lot of the people that you would be able to sell an interview piece of you are not going to be able to have access to on your own unless you have some other personal connection.

I mentioned earlier that the service pieces have been a lot harder to sell more recently. This is because a lot of this stuff is now found on blogs. Not necessarily personal blogs though, also company blogs or AAA or other insurance companies. These are the things about how to rent a car in Japan and how to cross between Israel and Jordan on the border for a day trip as an American. The thing is that the internet now has kind of addressed these questions. I often have people come to me and tell me “I want to pitch how to rent a villa in Italy” and I tell them that is not going to fly. The weird thing is though that there are still several basic questions answering services in magazines so it’s a weird sort of “catch 22” here where they are harder to pitch, but are still being published. The question is how you can be that person? What will separate you from the other people that are pitching these ideas? The best way to do this is to have experts.

If you are in a place for instance Italy. You find that you want to pitch an idea like how to rent a villa what will separate you from everyone else is you already have an expert. If you find an interesting service piece to pitch for instance I mention a lot that I went to Japan last year. We went to this festival that only happens once every 6 or 7 years and it is hard to get in, figure out what is going on, and there’s no information online about how to do it. For that, I might have to find people who are



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there and I might try to find somebody that works in the organizing party of the seats or maybe a tour guide that frequently brings people there.

The same goes for Palio in Siena. You can say how to just experience Palio, but an editor doesn't necessarily care unless you have been able to bring something extra to it. In that case, you're going to get a local who's lived there their entire life. You are going to get a tour guide who has access to a special place in the plaza to see it. You're going to get somebody in the city that is going to give you the things you need to know from a local movement standpoint. As you're on the ground when you're thinking about pitching these service pieces; these how-to pieces you want to be gathering the contact info or just the tips from the people that are going to add that extra oomph to that piece.

Today one of the best ways to pitch a service piece is around experience's that not everyone can have because then you yourself become that authority. You can also do this with a humorous or a how not to Ad like how not to be a travel writer. There is still a very startling number of magazines that still feature basic how to service content. I just noticed the other day that AARP which pays \$2.00 a word has one of these basic sections. So, you think well everybody must be pitching it. They're probably not getting as many pitches for that as for instance a travel narrative piece.

If you want to make it in there you need to be pitching something that isn't just based on your experience, but you also have other people lined up. When I say lined up I mean that you already asked them to participate. In your pitch mention I want to pitch how to plan an inexpensive, but luxurious getaway to Europe this summer while the dollar is strong. You're going to mention that you're going to feature this travel agent, this tourism board official, and this travel specialist that specialize in booking villa rentals. In your pitch, you're going to say I have already spoken to these people about providing their insights for the piece. That is going to be what makes your service piece stand out. You need to gather those connections and those people while you are there in the destination.

We have one question here that I think is about an interview. If a PR rep sends an e-mail offering to put you in touch with notable people for an interview do you contact the editor before you interview or do you wait until after? This is a good point. Sometimes you will do an interview because you are in a place and a PR person has set it up for you, but then you cannot find a home for it. Then you are screwed with the PR person. What I tend to do if someone has reached out to me is that first I will think about the editors I can contact, if I have the time, and where I would go. Sometimes I will just politely say no. I will tell them that if something comes up where I can use it at I will contact them, but right now I just don't see a good home for that.



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The other thing is you can also say thanks so much for the offer and then go hustle and try to place pitches. I wouldn't agree to the interview unless you already know that you have an editor that will buy that story. Either an editor that you work with regularly that you haven't specifically pitch this to and you know that they will buy it or one that you hustled and pitched to, but I wouldn't necessarily say yes without that.

We are going to move on from service because I want to make sure that we get to my hacks on how to do research on the road specifically. With postcards, postcards are interesting because I think they are a bit underrated these days. People really want to write features, but postcards are basically the same writing style and provoke the same point as a feature, but takes up much less space, so editors are much happier to publish them. What this means is that a postcard is going to be something that gives the reader the sensation of what it's like to be in a place. Also drives home a greater point about travel itself and the nature of the place you're speaking about, daily interaction, gratitude, all sorts of different things. With a postcard, these are the types of things that whenever you have a little snippet or moment in your trip that was just very special somehow, but it just not enough for a feature then that should be a postcard.

There are lots of different magazine sections that specialize in these, but one I wanted to draw your attention. These are the types of moments that we all have, but don't necessarily remember that we can pitch. National Geographic UK has one called snapshot. This is a conversation with a local in a destination often when you don't speak the same language. An exchange that happens that really showcases this universality of understanding and often some other theme. It is quite short I think they have it at 450 words. That is what I mean by postcard. That is when you take a whole trip and stuff it into 450 words.

The thing is when you look at it in that way like oh my God how do I stuff a whole trip to 450 words you run the risk of just sort of turning it into a paragraph and listing everything you did. What these really need to do is take one moment or a couple moments from your trip to stand for the entire trip or the entire point that you are trying to make. There are a lot of these some in the front of a book, but also in the back of a book. That last page of a magazine if you have ever seen that magazine that has that one page where they have a photo and a tiny vignette at the bottom. That is a great place to study these postcards. That is where they often take place and are done very nicely and in very few words.

This method that I was just talking about where you take several moments and weaving them together to paint a larger picture and show a larger theme this is what



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a narrative feature is all about. If you want to be writing features and you are not already the way to start is finding the seeds for those on your trips is to capture the little moments. Then during your trip or after thinking about what really struck you. What was the pervasive message that you got throughout your trip that you really couldn't shake?

For instance, I was in Detroit last year and we had gone with the idea that we heard Detroit had been revitalized, there was all this stuff going on, and it had become very hipster. We went there and we really didn't feel like it was. We really didn't feel like the hype about Detroit was true. There were certainly some things, but we felt like they were in little pockets and we felt like they were all being run by people who had come to Detroit and they weren't homegrown and coming out of Detroit. There was a friction between the two. That can be the kind of thing where I can go back and talk about different little pockets, and neat little hipster stores we had gone too and contrast that with what we walked through afterward.

Then also weave in a couple conversations with people and there I have just a few scenes that point to the conclusion that I had realized. You can't do these though until you have captured these vignettes on the road. Every time you have an exchange or you have a moment where you feel like you understand something about a place, you notice something, or you have the moment of tension where you thought it would be one way and it's not you should write that down. Write down what you're feeling, what you're thinking, and what particularly is different than what you thought it would be versus what it is. If possible if there is anything about your surroundings that plays into that either takes pictures or notes so you can pull out of those later about what is striking you.

That is what I have in terms of different sections and now I want to get into my favorite hacks for doing research while on the road. I realize that I forgot to make a sign for my absolute favorite one. So, I am going to start with that one so I don't forget. When I get to a place especially if it is a place that I haven't been before or a neighborhood of an area that I haven't been to I spend a certain number of hours or more getting lost on purpose. What I do here is I look at the map and I make myself an outline like a quadrant. I note the name of various major streets that are at the outline of my quadrant so that when I hit my quadrant I know. I will typically use this if I am going somewhere and I heard or seen something in my pre-research that there was a certain area that was quite hot or cool.

I think this is likely to come up with a lot of different businesses that might be interesting to profile, use in a roundup, or that might give me ideas for trends. What I will do is block out this little area and I will write down like on my phone or I will keep



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the picture open on google maps and I just wander around. I will try not to walk on that same street twice or walk in the same direction. I am just trying to cover as much territory as possible. That I found is really one of the best ways. I really like to do this one of the first evenings I arrive somewhere if I can. It is really one of the best ways when you are going like this.

You are trying to go to a museum, store, looking for something specifically to just get a feel for the tone of a place and for the attitude. This really helps you to see what is there as oppose to finding something that you are looking for. I really recommend doing this at the beginning of your trip if you can, but particularly in areas that have been told you by a guide or blog post by doing your research. This is an area where there is a lot going on because that's how you're going to find those places that people haven't already written about, the business that are newer, or just opened, and that are coming soon that are in those areas by wandering around on the sidewalk and going to those parts of the neighborhood that people aren't telling you to go to.

Now another thing that I like to do at the beginning of my trip, early on, or even before is what I call the dossier. If I am going somewhere that I don't already know. I want to essentially download all the basic information so I am not distracted by it when I am walking around. This means culture things, historical, the names of neighborhoods, or characteristics of the different neighborhoods. There are two ways that make it very easy to do this that I like. Wiki travel has these travel things for different cities that are like a guide book but in a very cursory way. All the things that you need to know and understand. It will tell you the different neighborhoods, characteristic's, major attractions, prices, to and from the airport, all this basic information so that you do not need to learn it. You will not have that crowding up your little idea antenna while you are on the road.

If you are going to be somewhere for some time and particularly if you are going to be looking for features I recommend going to a guide book. Reading in a guide book that first part that lengthy written section where they talk about the history, culture, and all these things. If you are going to be somewhere for a week or even 5 days I would consider finding those types of things and read a lot of it online. I would really recommend reading those things to give you a type of background in the factors that have made the destination what it is today. That will give you a basis to see what is different now which is from once derived trends and what's new and things like that.

Another thing to do early in your trip and this goes back to Lauren's question earlier about what are some basic tips about article research. Hang out like I said and you can do this using the CBB website, travel media, or PR web and see what is the new



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coming out of the destination right now in terms of tourism. But, then you don't want to just know what it is but you want to figure out why.

For instance, if you see that there are six new big brand hotels opening why is that? Was there a big investment six years ago? How has it translated into the restaurant scene? Is there a change? Are these hotels all in a certain neighborhood that didn't get tourist and now a lot of people are staying there? Why is that? That is why I like to go and walk around and look at these things. Not necessarily because I am going to write about what's in the press release, but because it is going to give me ideas of where to ask these questions and where to look for profiles and how to find the stories that are going to be news even if I don't necessarily have those inside scoops. This is how you are going to be able to dig those up.

Now, this came up recently I think at our idea feast. I hear a lot of people say oh my god I go on this press trip and we are there all the time. It is like three or four days nonstop and we have no times for ourselves or they said there was going to be four hours for us to explore on our own and then they screwed up the schedule. Then we had to do this tour and then we had no chance for us to look for our own stories. This happens.

Press trip schedules are never what they say they are going to be. They change between when you get them, when you get there, they change when you go to sleep, and when you wake up the next morning. This is just the nature of the game and the earlier you realize that the less disappointed you will be on press trips in your life. But, there is a way around it. What I like to do is whenever I am on a press trip I make sure I have one day before and one day after that trip in that destination. Now some press trips you start somewhere and end up somewhere else and that is great because you get to see two destinations.

This works particularly well when you could go back to places that you have been. What I do is that first day I use that day not only to get on the time zone, but to go through my dossier, do my getting lost walk, and get to know the place. Then when you are out on your press trip and out on all your tours you already know something about the destination, about what's going on, about how things work and that allows you better interactions with the people that are leading your tours or the locals that you are going to run into. You will be able to speak to them on more their level as opposed to somebody who is just plopped there and is trying to figure out what is going on.



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On the last day, however, this is when anytime on your trip you did a tour or stopped somewhere interesting and they had to hustle you out. You couldn't taste the wines from the winery or something like that. This is when you go back and do all the things that you would have liked to do the research on your press trip, but didn't have time for. If you have a press trip that is a rambling or a one-way itinerary this could be a little hard. But, you will always find that there is always something maybe in the last city that you stopped in or that are an easy day trip. Hop on a bus, train, or rent a car and go back and check out. This can be the saving grace for if you are on a press trip and they just did not come up with anything interesting in terms of story. This could be the thing that allows you to still get some good juice out of the trip that you are on.

Now, this is another one that you can do at any time on your trip. This is one of my favorite secrets. We all have work that we need to do when we are on a trip. We write our blogs, we have to write stories that have already been commissioned about other destinations, and we have other things that we need to do. I try as much as possible not to do that work in my room. Sometimes you just must because you need to concentrate. I really try to go out as much as I can and work in a café if it is daytime or a hotel lobby if it is the evening to eves drop.

I live in New York and people will say all sorts of things in cafes about the economics of our country that I learn in these cafes. In most destinations, you are going to be able to hear some things and the things that you hear are always going to be illuminating. You might hear about an interesting business. I was sitting at the café that I work out of in New York and I overheard someone talking about a farm that had this interesting investor model that their friend owned. It is right up near right where we have our retreat center. The thing is you will not get specific ideas for this, but it is really the best for coming up with trends. I really like to do this in both places in cafés and in hotel lobbies because in cafés you are going to get mostly locals and what they are interested in. In hotel lobbies, you are going to get mostly visitors.

This is fascinating because you are going to hear why people came to the destination, what they are doing when they are there, and things that will inform you not just in terms of what you're doing on your trip. But, what the average person, business traveler, or average tour group is doing in that destination. That is how you can see if the stuff that you're doing is ahead of what people are doing or in line with what people are doing and that helps you know where to pitch these stories when you are home.

Now I am just going to go to the next slide for a second because it is related. I call this the barista weekend. While you are in these places like these cafes or these



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hotel lobbies chat with your server about what they like to do. Talk about the bars, cafes, and restaurants they like to go to and specifically about what they like to do on the weekends out of town because this is going to be the way that you find the interesting day trips from your destination. The people who do day trips especially the things that are newer or that have more interest as oppose to more attraction value are going to be the people that live there. If you talk to the people who live there specifically people who work in the hospitality industry in some way. They typically have an interesting line on what these day trips are and what interesting things are coming up. I find out about all sorts of festivals this way, pilgrimage walking roads, close small towns, so I highly recommend this.

Now I am going to go back to the magazine cheat sheet. You can find much more information about this on our blog. It is going to be our [URL/pocket-idea-cheatsheet/](https://www.dreamoftravelwriting.com/URL/pocket-idea-cheatsheet/) and the idea of the pocket magazine cheat sheet is that you want to put together before your trip different magazine sections that you would not just like not pitch but, that you can fit several article ideas that you can come up with generally while you are on your trip. What this means is that if you are a person who likes to check out proper English teas then you're going to put the tea time magazine section which is a roundup of all the tea places in one city on your pocket magazine cheat sheet. If you're somebody who likes to chat with locals then you're going to put that geo snapshot that I mentioned on your cheat sheet.

The magazine cheat sheet is a way for you like I mentioned when we were talking about coming up with profiles and shorts it is a way for you as your out walking around to make sure those ideas are an "ah ha" there a yes. Like when we're talking about the three stages of idea grief. The third one when you see an idea a know that's a fit. The pocket magazine cheat sheet helps you do that by giving you a constant reminder to craft your ideas, to turn your eyes while you are out walking around specifically towards these types of things that fit in the format that the magazine is looking for. It is not just going to be that it's short, but that the end root high-low I mentioned which focuses on a specific them and each them has to mention the expensive and cheap way to experience that theme.

Thank you all for joining us and if you have any questions or anything please go ahead and send them to questions@dreamoftravelwriting.com.