



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

This week we're going to talk about how to set up an individual sponsored trip from scratch. Last week we talked about the different types of free travel for travel writers in terms of the difference between a FAM trip (or familiarization trip), a press trip, and the larger bucket of individual trips. Today I'm going to say sort of interchangeably individual trip or individual FAM.

Today we're going to talk about a couple different things. Because when it comes to setting up a sponsored trip, there's sort a season, a time and a place for doing individual trips and we're going to look at when or why you shouldn't try to set one up. First, we're going to look at why people would even let you do these things in the first place. As in, given the world today in terms of shrinking magazine budgets, in terms of everybody being focused on their Google ad spend, their videos. Why are they spending money to spend one journalist or blogger anywhere? Then we're going to look at a pretty crazy road trip that I took (I think it was two or three years ago now) that is a good case study for setting up lots of different types of individual things because there's lots of destinations some that are different sizes, to let you see the answers to several different questions that I've seen that a lot of people had in advance of this call about how to set up certain things.

I've been on both sides of the desk about the magazine side of things, but as a travel writer, I was thinking about this when we were setting up the call, I don't do a lot of funded travel (I feel like), but I guess it's just because I've been doing this for so long. I have taken quite a few individual press trips and some group press trips over the years, but I don't think I've ever had a single press trip request turned down. I know some of the folks that had sent me some things in advance of the call were having trouble getting various things done and I think it's going to come down to a lot about who you ask and we'll look at that in a second.

Before we get into the process of setting things up, it's really important to remember why these people are giving you these opportunities in the first place. The thing is that the reasons have really changed, and we talked last week about this thing called the column-inch formula (if any of you guys were with us there you might remember, but I'll just re-cap for the folks who weren't.) The column-inch calculation is an antiquated way that people from tourism boards and PR firms used to decide how much money to invest in a writer who was coming for a trip. What it meant was that they would look at the physical space in a newspaper in terms of inches that an article that this person was going to write would take up, and compare the space of that article as an editorial feature to the price of an ad that was the same size as that article. Then they would say "ok if this ad cost \$17,000 then we can spend up to \$17,000 on this person's trip or if what they're asking for cost less than \$17,000, then we should say yes." So, because there's so many different ways to advertise now, this has totally gone out the window. I often see people saying, "well I also have a blog and I'm also an influencer and I can offer this that and the other thing." The thing is that sometime that doesn't matter. It's



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

kind of a weird situation now because if you have a huge influence, even if you are writing for a very major outlet, it doesn't always make a difference to them if it doesn't line up with their goals. So what this means is that if you are pitching a CVB, a tourism board, a DMO, somebody high level that's in charge of one whole destination, whether that's large or small, statewide or countrywide, and what you pitch them might sound fantastic and it would be really great coverage, and it would be interesting stories, but they in their meetings with their bosses and their boss's bosses and eventually the director of tourism for the whole region have other goals in terms of what coverage they are able to fund at that moment, it doesn't matter how cool your thing is or how great your coverage is. They're going to say "great! Go ahead and do that coverage, but we can't help you with it."

As we are thinking about how to send emails to these people, specifically who to target and what information we can use to hook them and make them interested in us, it's really important that we always ground it with a very central and primary look at what is in it for this specific person that you are asking. What that means is that if you are asking the PR firm that represents a destination, you have to remember you're not just asking the destination, you're asking the PR person who has a job which is specifically to get coverage for this destination, perhaps a specific kind of coverage. In that case, you might look at the sort of you know success stories that that PR firm has on its website in terms of the types of coverage that they've gotten for other places, and that would allow you to know that that's what they consider to be a win for their client (which is the destination). Likewise, you can go to a CVB and see what articles they've shared that journalists have written in the past, and you can see what is considered a win for them. When we say what's in it for them, it's not necessarily what's in it for the it version of the destination, the gender neutral nameless thing of the destination, but specifically for the individual that you are trying to get on your side with this pitch, so that they help you take your trip for free.

Coverage alone is not always enough these days. This goes back to what we were talking about influencers earlier. In some cases, saying that you will not only be writing these print articles, but you will also be Tweeting it and Instagramming it and everything live while you are there, is very attractive. The other things that can be attractive are giving a good breath in terms of media in your coverage. So you can say that you're going to be doing you know some videos that will be shared here here and there, but the other thing that you can do (and we talked about this a little bit in some of our other webinars on travel content marketing) is that you can be pitching to go to these destinations as an individual sponsored trip without any editorial attachment at all. So you're not doing any stories, but you're just producing content through an individual sponsored trip, for that destination. So, for a hotel company, for a tour company. If you're more interested in getting on these trips and making cool trips and going to these places than specifically getting print bylines or online bylines out of these visits, this can be a really great way to do it. To create a partnership with the tourism board or



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

the hotel company, with the tour company to create a big batch of content for them around the destination, through a trip that you go on.

I was just at TBEX in Jerusalem last week and this guy did a talk that was ostensibly about how bloggers can work with brands and it ended up being a lot about SEO (which was interesting in its own right), but one of the very first things he said was that brands are not looking to pay for trips for bloggers to write on their own blogs. They're looking for people to write on the brand's blog, not the blogger's blog. Often when I have people come to me and say "oh I'd like to go on such and such trip and here's my pitch" I look at it and it's really all about their blog and them as an influencer. It's failing the what's in it for me factor from the first point because you're not saying what you're going to do for that destination or for that hotel through your background and through your experience. Also it might not be important to them for you to come and tweet about it or do an Instagram post about it because they might have much bigger influencers who are mommy bloggers or fashion bloggers or whoever who they already have doing that. So you need to look at where you can align with what they are looking to spend money on, what they already have a budget on. Because if they simply don't have the budget for something, you're not going to get anywhere.

A couple don'ts ok. So don't try to set up an individually sponsored trip when you are traveling in high season. This is a huge one ok? Go ahead and drop in the chat box if you've ever tried to go to Europe in the summer or something like that and have just been completely shut out every time you tried to get as little as a tour set up or something like that. This is one of the biggest mistakes that I see people make. It's newer because I think before blogs became big, all the print journalists knew you don't travel in high season because their print deadlines forced them to write those stories earlier and take those trips earlier. For instance, I have only recently started doing travel for research in the spring or the summer. I used to always be in Europe like in February or October, or all these times when it was cold and kind of rainy and gray and basically kind of shitty to be honest. These poor tourism people like my tour guides and stuff would always be like "oh I'm so sorry you have to see it now" and I was like "but this is the only time to see it. Either this or I have to go an entire year in advance and then wait for my story to come out, which for me from a financial point doesn't make sense." I know a lot of you guys have voiced that concern as well about having a story assigned, but they don't want it for two years because they want you to travel in the summer because it's a summer story.

Another thing (and this is one of these places where there's an exception to the rules for sure), but be very careful about looking to set up free trips and leaving or including in your pitch, that you're looking for travel for somebody besides yourself. The main exception to this rule is if you are inherently a family travel writer, then you should be experiencing it



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

with your kids because you want to be writing about what their experience is like as well. This kind of myth that you can take your spouse on all these great weekend trips because you're going on press trips and you know it's all paid has been perpetuated by some very specific people. In fact, I was looking at an e-book on the topic of setting up free trips (in preparation for this call) that's written by somebody else, and he leads with talking about all these different lovely trips that he's been on or other people that he knows have been on saying that he and his wife go here and had dinner here and a romantic weekend there. The thing is if you are writing specifically for the romantic travel market, then it's often a given that you'll be bringing your spouse, but it's not something that you should ever assume. I typically let the tourism board take the lead in telling me if I should think about bringing somebody else. The funny thing that happens is often the times that you would travel and potentially they would ask you to bring somebody else are mid-week and it wouldn't really make sense for you to bring your significant other or family. Always let the tourism board take the lead on that. Never assume that you can bring your significant other and never say that your friend or your significant other is your photographer, unless they actually are. This is another thing that I see a lot of couples try to do is say that one person is like the assistant or the photographer, but people can tell really fast if the other person has no ideas how to research or how to do travel writing.

The other thing (and I mentioned this last week, but I'm just going to give a little background again) is that if you're traveling to do just one story for a small outlet or an online outlet that's not say BBC Travel, that's probably the only one that stands alone on its merits and is just online. If you're trying to do just one story for one outlet that is not Travel & Leisure with a first-tier city or even the second-tier cities, that means New York, San Francisco, Seattle, maybe even Cleveland. Any of these cities that have a sports team say. If you're trying to go there and get sponsor travel for one story, for a not household name outlet, they are going to offer you something worth like \$20. I say the Seattle situation because for last week's call, Maria had sent me something for us all to discuss together, which was that she had emailed and also filled out the form and sent a very nice cover letter, checked all the boxes, done everything she was supposed to do to the Seattle tourism board to get something set up for a trip that she already had an assignment. She had all the ducks in a row. She was doing it for the essentially Associated Press of Finland, but what happened was that they pulled a column-inch calculation on her. They said, "can you tell us the readership and give us the ad rates?" because they didn't know her outlet and they wanted to calculate to see what was the equivalent for them to get an ad in that location. They looked at it and they decided that the only thing they would offer her is a sort of visit Seattle pass, those things that give you free public transit and entrance to museums, things like that. The thing about those passes is that they're usually very easy to get. They're like the baseline. If you can prove that you have a story and you're going to a large city, like they just hand them out like candy from their desks at the tourism board.



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

That's the kind of thing where you can take that one story that you have from one outlet that they might not know and add four others (that also might be from outlets that they don't know) and then you're starting to put together a case. You're starting to put together a portfolio that shows that you actually do need media assistance because for the large tourism boards and it's different for the small ones (and we're going to talk about that when we go through the example) but for the large tourism boards, they call it media assistance for a reason. It's really set up to be for media who have stories lined up who wouldn't be able to complete those stories without the help of the tourism board.

One of the really great things that I recommend...how many of you by the way, I should have asked this earlier...how many of you drop in the chat box if you have been on a sponsored trip that was just you, so not necessarily with a group like a press trip, but a sponsored trip that was just you or that you have never been on a sponsored thing that was just you. This can be a tour, it can be a meal, it can be a hotel stay, anything like that. Drop over here in the chat box, just a yay or nay if you've been on an individual sponsored thing or not. Oh Stacy that's great. Which newspaper was it? Yeah, some people are saying that they've been on group ones only. Yep, hotel stays. Oh great. The Tribune, great! So, we've got a good mix. I feel like one of things that I'm noticing from people that say yes, I have, is that it's often been in connection with a story that was assigned.

This is the thing. If you are new to travel writing or new to sponsored trips and you know I've seen a couple people in here who say they've done it with their partner and one for instance is somebody who I know writes about family travels. Like I said, that's definitely the exception to the rule about don't ask for things for more than just yourself. If you write about family travel, then that's a no-brainer that you should be asking to take your family as well. If you are new either to free travel or travel writing, one of the best things you can do is to start doing day trips. So, things near where you live in your own city if you live in a big city that are little chunks of sponsored things. So, you have a tour or a tour and a meal, or an overnight in a hotel, or something like that. Then what you do is you take those examples, so you go on the things, you write your stories, and then you put together these little case studies (and I'm going to do a whole webinar all about case studies, specifically for content marketing and things like that in a little while), but the way that you do these case studies for press trips is that, if you have a blog you might already be familiar with this because some people include it in their media kit. You just create a little one-pager or a couple page PDF, and you can do this in PowerPoint if you don't have any sort of layout software. PowerPoint's a good way to hack making a nice PDF. But you can say where you went, what you were offered, what was free, and the stories that came out of it and you know if they were stories that went online you can say how many social shares or if you have access to the Google analytics, you can say how many eyeballs they got or something like that. You can also just include the links and some of the nice little screenshot or scan of the article.



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

I'm not going to talk too much about how to set up your website to kind of impress people into giving you a free trip right now, because I don't think it's too important. I realized actually I was preparing this call that I get invited on all sorts of stuff. I use the example a lot of the press trip that I didn't go on to Dubai. I get invited on stuff that has nothing to do with what I do that sounds really interesting and luxurious. My website, I don't even have most of my clips on there. I don't even think I have national magazine clips up there. Like I have very little stuff up there, but one thing I do do is I include the layouts of the article. If it's a print article, I either get the digital version and I take a PDF if it has the spread of the article or if it's something online I take a screenshot (as long as it's a good-looking website. If it's not a good-looking website, don't worry about it.) I find that that displaying that your articles appeared somewhere nice that has a nice presentation (and I've heard this from both editors and tourism boards) that that can go a long way with people.

When you're putting together this case study you'll show who the tourism board was or who the tour company was or whoever, what you received from them, what the coverage was like, and it's just, that's all you really need to have. Just having that one bit of professional collateral so to say, can really go a long way setting up these trips. When you are emailing people (and we're going to get to who to email in a minute), but when you are emailing people to set these things up, as you're listing you know, I'm a full time freelance travel writer, I've been writing this many years, I write regularly for this this and this publication and I've put together some examples of trips that I've been on in the past and the coverage that those trips received. Then you just put like a drop box link or something to the document. That goes a long way because the people who work in these tourism boards and PR companies are used to these sly deck style things to look at you know it's like brochures and what they give you as a press person. They respond to that because it's what they're used to giving. So you put together your own little press pack to give back to them.

I didn't say this last week, so I want to make a small aside about when you should not travel for free in an editorial function. Go ahead and drop in the chat box if this is something you've been curious about, but because I live in New York I always get asked about the New York Times. It's kind of like an inside joke with tourism people I think, that the New York Times says it doesn't accept press trips and everybody knows somebody from the New York Times that they've been on a press trip with, and my answer is always "I go on press trips so I don't pitch the New York Times" but the vast vast majority of publications really don't care if you've been on a press trip, to the point where they will often tell you explicitly to feel free to drop my name if you would like to set up a press trip or would you like me to connect you to the tourism person to help set up your trip. A lot of this has to do with shrinking travel budgets on the publication side. However, there are some sad hold-outs and I say sad for this reason, like the New York Times that have very strict policies. So, the New York Times theoretically (I'm not sure how it works), but they do a background check on you and if you have taken any free travel in the last three years or have a history of accepting free travel



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

before that, then you can't write for them. So, for people who I know who write for them are so fastidious that they will be at cocktail parties at conferences and trying to make sure that people don't tweet their name in connection to the party being sponsored by somebody. So, you have to be really really careful with the Times, but the problem is that these outlets don't actually pay so much. For instance, the Times is known that it won't pay your travel and it won't let you accept any. So if you want to write about Kandahar for the New York Times, you have to already be there.

In some cases (and Joe just mentioned this in the chat box) there is a bit of a don't ask don't tell policy and so it's a little tricky because there are some publications that will get angry if it was a sponsored thing and you didn't tell them. By and large I've seen that the ones that are in that position will ask you right away. So if you pitch them and they like the article, and they care, so they it's not that they totally don't care and support free trips, and it's not that they don't have a don't ask don't tell policy, but they would get angry if you had taken a free trip. They will typically tell you when they're interested in your article, like this looks good let's talk about it a little bit, was this a sponsored trip? If it was then they'll say sorry we can't accept this story. Don't worry too much about saying up front that it was a sponsored trip. I know a lot of people come to say when they're pitching a story that they or if they want to go on a press trip, that they want to lead the pitch by saying "I've been invited on this trip blah blah blah". Don't do that. So, we're talking about sponsored trips that are individual today, so this isn't so much the case, but don't put in a pitch and especially don't lead your pitch by telling the editor that you are pitching them a story because it was a free trip. Editors don't like that.

Yeah, so Lenora had mentioned that some people talked about being a lifetime ban at the New York Times and this is something that I haven't personally tested, but in theory, if you've gone on you know more than a handful of press trips or had free lunches or whatever, then you might have a lifetime ban from the New York Times. I hope that one day that will open up because actually Conde Nast Traveler used to have a policy that was very similar, not about the ban, but about no free travel and they polled their readers and I actually sat in on one of these reader sort of survey sessions and their readers didn't care. They didn't really care if the travel was free or if Conde Nast had paid for it themselves. They've now loosened their policy.

Let's get into how exactly we go about planning these things. So again, if you have a trip that you have coming up, that you want us to sort of tie in to this section of the call, please feel free to drop it in the chat box. This is a good time do that. There's a couple that I had seen come in, so I'm just going to see if some of those people are on the call because otherwise I can email them back later. Great, so Lena's here. Nobody. Ok guys. I can workshop your stuff if you want, but feel free to just drop it in later on if you think about it.



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

One thing that I had noticed with both the one that Lena had sent and also one that I had talked to somebody about who isn't on the call but is probably going to listen to the recap, is setting up your own accommodations and your own travel and then doing the rest, so doing the activities and things like that through the local tourism office and I'm going to talk about that in the context of the attack order right now. This is essentially what I also use when I'm doing trips that are not sponsored, but it's particularly important to go in this order when you're doing sponsored trips because like I said before the number one cardinal rule of don't pitch a press trip when, is if you're trying to go in high season. If it's really important to you to get the trip set up for free either because like Jill mentioned she wants to go on a cruise to Antarctica. If that's something that is not in your bandwidth to paying for completely out of pocket and you want to do a media rate or you want to get it sponsored, then you need to think really hard about this point here. If you can be more flexible about your dates, you can often get a much better set up. I've been in situations where I needed to go somewhere and I was even going there last minute and they had like their biggest tourism thing of the year set up, and they were able to accommodate me, but only because I both had an assignment and I wrote about that destination once every three or four months. There are some exceptions to that high season rule, like I said there's some exceptions to all those rules but they tend to be built a lot about relationships.

Start your trip planning (if you need the first two things which are transit and lodging) both early and by looking at the destination's high season, particularly the destination's high season. Not the region's high season, but the destination because it might be that you're going somewhere very very cold in January when you would think it's not their big time of year, but they have their winter fest in January when they build a whole village out of ice and people come from all around. You might have already known about that and want to base your story on that or maybe you don't. This can be a way to find out either if there's good story angles that you don't know about, but that might preclude you from getting a free trip, or if there's good story angles that you could potentially research another time.

I talked about this a little bit last week, but the thing about a festival and I don't think Kristin is here, but Kristin had asked last time about this festival in India that happens every October. If you want to cover a festival, this is really difficult for tourism boards because it's when their hotels are the most expensive, but you as the writer can't go any other time to get that. Any time you're trying to cover something that really is like the highest season and a very busy time, that's when you want to be planning very far in advance. When you look at when to go, that's also combined with when to get in touch. I always think that you should draft off of press trips to get a sense of when to get in touch. What that means is that a lot of press trip invites kind of confound me, but they come out like six to eight weeks before the trip would go out, or maybe like maximum twelve weeks really really maximum. So that's kind of the time frame that people are looking at to fill these spots. Then you have to back track right, because before the press person put that trip together, put together the list of people to invite,



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

put together their writers, then they've been organizing that internally. So maybe three to four months, I would say is the really common window when people would be organizing these things. Generally, three to four months off of when you would want to go is when you should start to get in touch because that can also give you leeway that if the specific week you're looking at has you know the International Association of Swine Doctors I don't know in town that week (which is not something that you would have ever found out about on your own), they can tell you and say look we have a big convention, but I can accommodate you the week after. If you're looking at doing something that's really like a once-in-a-lifetime, once-in-a-year something, start looking at least one year in advance. So as soon as that festival finishes for the year this year, get in touch with them about how you can make it work to attend it the next year.

We're going to talk about a little interesting hack that you can use to get invited places that's really good for these festivals in a little bit, but I'll just give you a little tease here. When you write a round-up about something and a round-up is when you have (we also call it a basket of kittens a lot here), but a round-up is when you have several different things around a theme together in one call or in one article. That's a little bit different than a listicle because they tend to be more tightly focused around one theme, but very diverse geographically. What you can often do is you can write a round-up about something and do interviews by phone to get some information on that round-up and in doing so, build a positive relationship with that tourism board, that destination, that tour company, whatever and have them say at the end "oh we'd love to show you around some time. Let us know when you can come." That's actually one of the best ways to get invites for individual press trips is actually through doing an interview about the place for a different article by phone, that you can then leverage into more articles. It's also really helpful in terms of pitching because you've already got some background on the destination.

I've got a couple questions over here I just want to look at quickly. So Jill had a question that goes right into my next point. So how to get there. This is like the elephant in the room when people talk about free trips because it's such a pain in the butt. I was in a Facebook group that I'm in, I think it's the Travel Plus Social Media group. Somebody was posting that she's setting up something with an airline for the first time. I honestly just don't even approach airlines. I have in the past and they're just such a pain in the butt to work with that I have always found it's easier for me to just get to accrue points and miles through credit cards and pay for my flights whether I need business class flights or crazy flights or one-way flights between Japan and Reykjavik, Iceland (which is seriously an itinerary that I just booked the other day) that it is so much easier for me to do those on my own by using points. So, I'm still not paying for them, but I get the actual flights I want and I don't have to spend weeks courting some variety of airline officials. I do have friends that get a lot of airline things set up, but the thing is because they write with the airline industry. People who get airline trips set up that don't write about the airline industry tend to be looking for regional flights. It can



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

be really hard to get international flights from the airlines directly set up for a big long-haul flight.

Another interesting hack (which is not completely relevant to what we're talking about today but) if you have any friends who work for airlines, they have a certain number of friends and family passes that you can usually buy off them for some negligible amount of money and then you just have to pay the taxes and fees on your flight and then they can book you a basically free flight to South Africa or whatever.

If you want to get your flight sponsored, the best way to do that is actually to go to a third party. That third party is either the tourism board (which Jill mentioned here) or a hotel. This is a really weird way of looking at it, but (I'm going to talk more about this in a minute) but hotels are really where the money for sponsored trips is these days. They're the ones who are putting together these really flashy itineraries, they're flying people across the world. I had somebody in the Philippines for an Eco Lodge say that they wanted to bring me the other day. The thing about these trips is that they're really nice if you have a lot of time.

So hotel trips are great for writers who are doing travel writing part time capacity, like they like a good way to pay for their vacations or to take their family interesting places, or for people who are doing travel writing as like a second, third, fourth career and it's kind of an interesting retirement and you don't care so much about the income. For instance, I could never go to a hotel for five or six days to basically just be at the hotel and do the amenities nearby. I just don't have the time. I have too much work. That's been the case for pretty much the whole time I've been a travel writer. This gets back into deciding how much of your travel writing you want to be doing to earn a good amount of money versus that you just like traveling. I find that hotel trips can be not just the most luxurious because they have the hotel, but because they have the budget, they're setting up crazy meals for you at their property and otherwise, they're setting up tours for you, they're doing the flights, they're doing all sorts of stuff. So when Maria in the Seattle case mentioned earlier that she got sort of turned away by the tourism board because they didn't know what the Finnish media were, in that case I said go to the hotels. There's a couple different ways to go to hotels, but just getting the name of the local PR person (which you can do online for any of the big chains) is not very hard. However, the thing about big chains, just like tourism boards, is that they have their quotas, they have their priorities and it can take a lot of you know journalist bling (so to say) to impress them. However, boutique hotels, especially new boutique hotels, and especially boutique hotels that come from a backer, which is pretty common. In Italy for instance, where I used to do a lot of work, these are often former noble families who have turned their family estate or their family villa or something into some sort of tourism, either it's like a mini village, where everyone has their own house, or it's a hotel, or something like that. These are the people who are putting on the cool trips because to them it's part of the



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

brand. The whole experience is part of the brand. Just like this Dubai press trip that I mention pretty often.

The reason we go in this order (when to go, how to get there, whatever) is that we're starting typically with the tourism board with when to go. We're letting them know that we're looking at coming, but they're not necessarily the one that we're looking at getting to pay for the rest of this or to put it together. We're often using them to see what we can get, but also to get more information about who is better able to support our trip because they've got a lot of people coming to them. In the case of Maria's Seattle trip, she was actually referred to a set of hotels that do have media rates or that do comp stays in conjunction with the tourism board to get in touch with or the tourism board said that they would get in touch with them for her.

In terms of how to get there (like Jill mentioned) you can often get some more leverage with the airline by going to the tourism board, but if you're traveling regionally, I find that going to the train company or the person that does train passes, like Eurail is really great in Europe about working with journalists and bloggers. Amtrak also has a new program. Bus companies can be good for this. Bicycle companies can be good for this. Can give you more options and also more interesting stories than just having the tourism board try to set it up for you.

Where to sleep is an interesting thing because a lot of people these days I've noticed, and in fact Lena even mentioned in her email about the trip that she had a question about that she had already set up her hotel. A lot of folks, myself included, just go right ahead and set up an Air B&B without even reaching out to hotels. What can actually be interesting if you have the tolerance for it, is to sleep in a different hotel every night and that can be much easier to set up than asking a single hotel to give you five nights, three nights, whatever because then each property doesn't have to pony up so much. They don't have to make a case to their boss about why you need to be there so many nights. You don't need to come up with so many stories to explain why you're going to be there so many nights, and when you're writing a story about a place, you're often going to end up getting multiple lodging options anyway. So you would say "for a luxury option this hotel has recently opened started by a couple that's an interior designer and a craft brewer from Brooklyn blah blah blah. For a budget option, blah blah blah. For families, blah blah blah." So staying in a different place every night (if you can stomach it personally) can be easier to set up and also better for your stories.

Now what to do. So now these bottom parts of what to do and where to eat, we're going through on timeline here, so this is three to four months unless you're going somewhere crazy, then we're looking at one year out. How to get there, this is also going to be three to four months. Where to stay, this can be two to three months. You can even do it one month out. What to do. This is stuff you can be doing one month out or even two weeks out because



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

when you're looking at getting into attractions, it's typically just a matter of letting them know you're coming. The one thing (I have on another slide, but I just want to mention) is this is a bit different in the US than in other countries. In the US if you're media and you want to come and you want to come for free, you typically just need to be contacting them in advance and then they put your name on a list at the door, then you'll have a kit waiting for you when you come and typically also somebody there to guide you around.

What I really recommend, because one of the big differences between a group tour and an individual tour is the tour guided-ness of it. When you're on a group tour (a good group tour), you should have individual tour guides in all the places that you go to that are able to unpack the hidden stories, the anecdotes, the background, and give color and depth to the destination for you. That's something that I like a lot of us (myself included) skip out on when we travel on our own. We think oh I just need to get the hotel sponsored and I know I want to go to this this and this and I want to profile this business and I want to eat at this place, but you would be astonished. I'm sure most of you (and drop over here in the chat box if you haven't had this experience) but most of you have probably at some point in your various traveling journeys gone a trip and experienced how even a place that you think you know, you can learn so many things from a tour guide. I've taken a couple tours here in New York and New York is a place that I've only lived for the last seven or eight years, but they're always fascinating. In a city like this, somebody can give you a tour of two blocks and just come up with so so many stories.

My favorite sort of anecdote about the power of going on a tour, is that I used to ghost write for an Italian concierge tour planning company. So they're job was to put together tours and itineraries for people around Italy. So they had to know things. They had to know the area, they had to know what was good. They had to know what would be a match for their clients. They somehow had done this for several years without going on a tour, even though they were putting their clients on tours with tour guides. Then one day they went on a tour of the city where they actually owned their home in Italy and they were just blown away.

So if you have not been on a tour like that, I will tell you that doing that tour one-on-one versus doing that tour in a group is a such better experience. What happens is tour guides always tailor the tour to their audience. So if it's just you, you get to really dig in to what you want to know about the destination and they go through their catalogue of stories and their catalogue of anecdotes and they highlight ones for you that they usually don't do on their group tours or public tours. You can ask them even deeper questions and they're able to answer you because they're not neglecting other people on their trip.

In terms of the what to do category here, I really really recommend when you're setting up sponsored trips on an individual basis that you also make sure to include some tours. You can



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

do them differently. You can do some food tours of course, you can do some historic tours. In the National Park Service (which I've actually worked with a lot) it seems like it would be hard to do press stuff with the National Park Service, but they're actually quite organized about it. They have some really great tours. Joe's got a point over here. It's even more interesting when you visit a destination with non-national tour guides based there i.e. in the UAE there are very few Emirate tour guides. You learn so much from these people because they're also discovering the place themselves. What I really love about Joe's point is that those people (especially if they're from the country you're from or even if they're not) know what it is interesting to visitors about that destination. I find often locals, they know some interesting stories but they don't know what is new to you and they don't highlight those facts. Tours can be very very easy to set up. Either by going through the CVB or going directly to the tourism board. Setting up tours, like most tour companies owners are just happy to set them up for you. I've never had any problem doing that, whether it's an individual tour or not.

The next thing that is harder is where to eat. Obviously, I imagine most of us (because it's something we spend a lot of our waking hours doing, and also probably write about) care about where we eat on our trips and it might even be the reason that we travel, but this can be one of the more difficult things to get sponsored actually. Even if you do get it sponsored, you get into this weird situation where you might be eating places that the tourism board has sent you to that are not actually the most interesting places, because they're trying to guess what you would want to cover. While you can certainly get your meals sponsored and to do that I recommend going through the tourism board and not directly to the restaurant, unless it is a restaurant group. If is a restaurant group, then you go directly to the PR firm that represents the restaurant group and then they will take care of it for you. If you want to get your meals sponsored, just be very very careful that you don't just give the tourism board carte blanche to set them up for you if you have specific places that you want to eat.

We've covered a couple of these points already, but we went through the attack order. Now the specific set up process. Like I said, we want to start with the CVB. We're starting with them too see what we can get, but also what we can get sponsored, but also to see what other information we can get from them. (I was going to flip over to my web browser to show you a couple things, but I won't do that now because we're getting short on time.) Pretty much every CVB (especially the large cities) has they call it like a "what's hot" list. This is where the mention new places that are opening, renovations that are happening, all sorts of people who want coverage. So what's really brilliant about these lists, is that they are tailor-made lists of who you can contact to set you up with free stuff because these people currently have a marketing budget and they are looking to get more coverage for whatever their new thing is. So whether that's a hotel that's just about to open, a restaurant that's just opened, a new tour offered from an existing tour company, something like that, these things are in the market for coverage. They are like a ready-made sponsored thing and I highly recommend



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

starting with those. The caveat is they tend to have very updated what's new lists from large cities where (like I said it can be a little difficult to get things done) so when you see the what's new list, you can ask the CVB if they'll connect you, but you might be better off just finding the information of the particular hotel, restaurant, tour company, whatever and just reaching out to them yourself.

You can also go for press releases that are not so specifically curated by the tourism board to a variety of wire services (and I'm not going to list them all because there's really a lot but) PR Newswire is pretty good for travel and also Media Kitty, which has listing of press trips that are open and things like that are a couple travel specific places to think about it. If any of you guys have some that you like to use, that as a journalist you've used successfully in the past to find press releases, drop them in the side and I'll mention them to the group.

Somebody had a quick question. What does CVB stand for? CVB is the industry word for tourism board. It means Convention and Visitors Bureau. DMO, which is another abbreviation (Oh thank you. TravMedia. I forgot TravMedia. That's another really good press release service for travel stuff). So DMO is similar to tourism board except that it tends to be a private entity. It's called the Destination Management Organization, but they all accomplish the same purposes of the functionality of the tourism board in various cities. So sometimes when you're Googling who to contact, you might need to try the name (and I always start with CVB for Google because that's usually how they're listed). I Google the name of the destination and CVB. These days almost everybody has changed their websites and sometimes even the name of their nonprofit or the company, whatever to be visit whatever, so Visit California, Visit Indy, you know whatever. That also works if the CVB query doesn't come up. You can also search for the name of the location and DMO.

I mentioned briefly Media Kitty. There's a couple sites that aren't going to be necessarily useful for press releases of who you can reach out to cold, but you can just put up a thing that says "I am coming to blah blah blah. If you have a new tour, a new restaurant, a new hotel, whatever. This is the kind of stuff I'm looking to cover. Get in touch with me." The two main places to do that are Media Kitty (which is more travel-specific) and HARO, which stands for Help a Reporter Out. I believe with Help a Reporter Out you used to have to tag it to a specific destination, but that might not be true anymore. If anybody has some updated information on that. I haven't used it in a couple years myself.

Lena is asking is there a good site that publishes press releases when major airlines launch flights to new destinations? Those will definitely be on both TravMedia and PR Newswire for sure because I always see the airline ones on that stuff all the time. You can also set a Google alert for those as well. If there's something like an airline that you want to know about, you can set Google alerts so you don't need to pawing through the sites every day, but



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

also on PR Newswire and TravMedia you can set something so that you get all of the travel press releases in just link title form in your email every day.

We talked about how tours are the easy part and flights and meals are not. I want to touch on how free attractions work very differently in the US than abroad. I've had some really hilarious instances (I think in part because I have a press pass and in part because I speak so many languages) with rants from museum officials in different countries about these Americans who come in and think that they can just walk in by showing a business card and they're like "anybody can print a business card" and I'm like "well anybody can print a press pass. Actually, the newspaper offices just print them themselves." Here's the thing – in the US you cannot go up to a museum and just show them you're press pass and get in, but that's how it works in Europe. If you are primarily writing with the US, then it's really easy. You just write to the PR or marketing person in advance. However, if you're looking at writing about Europe (and I don't have as much experience with this in Asia because I don't usually try to get free things when I'm there because I'm with my family) but if you are trying to go places in Europe, they will usually say very plainly on the entrance to the museum you know EU citizen price this, seniors price this, media this and media is free with valid media card. So how do you get a valid press card? If you write regularly for a publication that is a newspaper, you can often get them to make one for you. I've seen some websites that do them also. The primary way is to be in an association. There's a few and if you're new to travel writing, you do need to have a certain number of clips usually to get in one. There's a couple that are a little easier. I'm going to send out an email when the reminders go out after the webinar. I'm going to drop those names in there so you can see them. The one caveat I will tell you is there's one that's run by another company that sells travel writing courses, which is not actually a travel writing association, but they do make press cards. They essentially say like "oh you know pay us \$200 and you get this press card." I've seen that one get denied some places, so I will say if you're trying to get a press card specifically to get in museums and things like that in Europe or other places that are a bit more stringent, Lena had mentioned NATJA- I think I can just chat this on to everybody. So NATJA is a pretty easy one. This is the National uh North American Travel Journalists Association. SATW is the Society of American Travel Writers. That one is a bit harder. There's another one that I'm probably going to botch, but it's International Food Wine and Travel Writers Association. This one (like NATJA) is also a little bit easier, so if you have some background and you've written online, you can probably get into IFWTA and maybe to NATJA. NATJA I will say is privately owned and run, so it's a for-profit company. While that totally works as a press card and it's a legitimate travel writing association, it's not kind of as well editorially regarded as SATW. I'm not really sure the standing of the International Food Wine and Travel Writers Association in the battle between NATJA and SATW.

I've titled this slide "Blah Blah Networking Blah Blah" because how many times have people told you "oh if you want this, you should go network. You should go to events. You



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

should meet people. It's so easy to get gigs, to get free travel, if you just do that." The thing is like yeah I could just tell you to go to events. You can probably meet people there, but there's easier ways that are more direct to network, specifically to get on trips like this that are better use of your time. So in particular, I really like calling the tourism board. That is really underrated. I mean I think in general phone calls are really underrated, but the people who work in tourism boards or parent companies are used to being on the phone. They're phone people. So, they're really happy for you to call them and say "hey I'm thinking about a trip to blah blah blah. What would you recommend?" I've actually had people who I emailed to set up a trip be like "oh I'm going to call you!" and I was like "Actually I'm in Turkey" or something like that. They really rely on the phone. So if you are trying to get in touch with the tourism board and either you're having trouble or you feel like you don't have enough of an in, sometimes sending them a sort of cold email where that's all they have to go on, bring your personality into it, show them that you're legitimate and that they can trust you by calling them and building a connection that way. You don't have to meet the PR people at an event to do that. You can do it through just picking up the phone and building these one-on-one connections.

The other thing is that a good way, besides going to generic networking events to build those connections, is to go to these lunches. Some of you might have gotten these before (and I probably get more invites than most because I'm in New York, but I also get invited to these things in San Francisco and Dallas) but if you live in a city, the PR firms in your city are regularly bringing in people from tourism boards that they represent to have meetings with people in the city. If you just write to the PR firm and say "hey I cover travel and blah blah blah. Can you let me know when you have related events going on?" They will put you on these lists and you will start getting invited to these lunches. This (like the interview trick that I mentioned before) is a really good way for people to just casually be like "oh yeah we'd love to have you come check it out" and boom, there you go. That's your opportunity to set up an individually sponsored trip to that destination.

You can do the same thing that these tourism boards are doing by stopping in to say hi yourself. You can do this either with PR firms or with tourism boards, but if it's a place that's far away, obviously that's difficult. You can go to the PR companies in your city and write somebody and say "hey can I come in and chat with you about what I cover and see what clients you have that might be a fit?" This can also be a really great way to just start getting those invitations for individual things coming to you without it having to be based solely on your publication track record or finding you online.

We talked about interviewing for a round-up to get the invite for the next trip and how hotels are the real money and so we're getting a little low on time (oh in fact it's 4:30 already) so if any of you have to go, I'm so sorry we started late and I really appreciate you sticking around



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

with us already a little longer and I'm going to start going through planning a specific trip on your own and I'm going to try to wrap it up in the next ten or fifteen minutes. So if you can stay, I'm going to go through these next couple slides a little quickly. If not, you can catch the remainder of the call on the replay which will go out after the call today.

This trip over here is something that I set up like I said, two or three years back and it was a very complicated itinerary. This was a case where I had somebody traveling with me also who was a travel writer, well travel writer/photographer as well and so she had her own outlets. So between the two of us, we split up (because it was such a hefty trip) who was contacting who about what. In some destinations like Asheville, I got us a stay at the Biltmore, which is the estate of the Vanderbilts which now has a bunch of different hotels on it. It costs like it's like Disneyland. It costs \$60 just to get in. If you don't get that sponsored you're probably not going to go as a travel writer. She was working on some other things because she wrote hotel reviews for some other luxury travel sites. In this case, like I said, this is a really large itinerary so we're not going to go through exactly every single piece of it. I'm going to go through the attack order. In terms of when to go, you might notice the timing here is horrible. This was Labor Day weekend actually right here in the middle. This was one of those things that it was the only time we could go, there was nothing we could do and so we planned quite far in advance in terms of getting in touch with people. I also was very careful with these days where the actual Labor Day weekend, we were doing things (as much as possible) were either going to be completely on our own self-guided or we were going to be in places where it would be easier for us to get stays.

Going through these cities you know to start with, Charlottesville and Asheville are relatively big cities, but they're not on the level of Nashville. So for Nashville, I have worked with the tourism board there before and they're not necessarily like intransigent but they can be hard if you don't have a big story. They have attractions there like the Country Music Hall of Fame, some really great historic houses and things like that that are really lovely to work with and a lot of new hotel chains and new restaurants are opening up. In this case when we were trying to go to Nashville, this was a case where I essentially bypassed the CVB for the purpose of this trip in order to more efficiently and effectively get things set up.

However, in the case of the previous two 'villes so to say, Charlottesville and Asheville, I was able to go to the CVB, let them know I was coming, as well as go to some attractions directly that I wanted to go to. So, in Charlottesville (well actually outside of Charlottesville) is Monticello, which is Thomas Jefferson's former home and as I mentioned in Asheville there's the Biltmore. In those cases you know I could go to the CVB (and I have actually since) gone to the CVB and said "hey I'm coming. Make up some stuff for me" and they did all the stays. But because it was a busy time, I did my own legwork about where I wanted to go (and I'm going to show you some more about that on the next slide) and then I reached



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

out to those places individually. I did that both in terms of the attractions we wanted to go to as well as the places to sleep, as well as the restaurants. In Asheville for instance, which is a really big foodie town, there's a guy who has gotten national coverage (and I have written about him several times, but I haven't gone on his tour) who does a foraging tour in the Blue Ridge mountains. So this was a case where it was really easy for us to just write them and say "hey we're coming. When do you have a tour that we can join?" They said "great." They actually moved the tour to a different part of the day for us to go on, to make sure that it would fit into our schedule. Like I said, the tour operators (even a guy who is a big tour operator in a very foodie city) they're always very happy to accommodate you because especially if it's not just a single person tour company, they can always bring in another guide.

And again, I mentioned this previously, remember the ethics of free travel. If you are going on a free trip, it's not free. Someone else is paying for it and if it's a small company like a tour company, that owner is either giving you the tour himself so that he doesn't have to pay a guide or he's paying a guide out of his pocket so that you can go on the tour for free. Especially with tours, always make sure that if the tourism board hasn't covered it for you, that you're tipping your tour guides, ok?

The next thing we did on here (and now we're starting to get into the holiday weekend) is I went to this place called Eureka Springs which I had researched a couple times for some stories. It's this really weird wacky place in Arkansas and I had never even been to Arkansas before and this trip completely changed my conception of Arkansas to be honest, in terms of a tourism destination. What I did here was that, coming from Nashville to Eureka Springs, there were quite a few other stops of interest in Arkansas actually. So I reached out to the CVBs because they're not even second or third tier cities. They're really excited to help you and get you out and roll out the red carpet for you. I had meals set up for me. I had people give me (because we were doing a driving tour and we were short on time), I had somebody from the CVB hop in the car with me or drive me around and give me a little tour of their city. If you're looking to do the kind of thing where you have really one-on-one attention, especially if you're new (and this is what I mentioned starting with day trips) going to smaller destinations and going to the CVB directly will be a really great way to have somebody set up a whole itinerary for you and give you a lot of trip story idea options that you wouldn't (because you're newer) have known to find on your own. In the case of these two places or this leg here, I really didn't know about a lot of these cities. I had gotten in touch more generally with the tourism board of the state and was referred to some of these destinations and I had a really really great experience and it taught me some things that I was able to use in some other stories.



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

In here, now we're at like the Friday of Labor Day weekend and it's Atlanta and there's a big football game and we wanted to go to the new College Football Hall of Fame, which was doing some new innovative things in terms of design, but there was a football game and there was nowhere to park. So the person at the museum though knew all these things, so if we had just gone on our own to check out this museum during the football game on a holiday weekend, we physically never would have got there. There would not have been anywhere to put our car. So this is one of the reasons that I really like to start (like I said) with the tourism board because they know the whole schedule of their destination and they know all the tricks. So because we did that, we were set up with a parking pass that somebody gave us as we drove by the museum and then we put our car away and we were able to go even though it was a very very busy time.

The other thing, especially if you're on a road trip, and you go to the state level tourism board first, so I mentioned up in Arkansas they were able to connect us with some different cities to stop in, and in the case of Georgia that was definitely apparent. I had written some stories previously in a round-up format about Athens which is really big for its music history and there's several other small cities that have Antebellum heritage between Athens and the coast or between Atlanta and the coast. They're the type of things that are right on the way and very easy to stop in, but if we had been driving ourselves we wouldn't necessarily have known how to make the best itinerary in terms of what exactly is going to be open when, where you have to stop for lunch versus where it's good to stop for breakfast, and all those things. By reaching out, they were able to help me schedule the best use of my time.

I have another slide that I don't think we're going to get to, but the thing about time that (like I mentioned with the hotels) people always want you to stay longer, they want you to stay for a lot of time, unless it's a big city and very expensive hotels. Most small tourism boards, most boutique hotels, they just want you to stay like forever. They always think you know that you'll get more by being there you know five days, three days, however many days than one day or a half day. The thing is if you have that time, that's really great, but I've also found that if you don't have a lot of time, going to the CVB can be the best way to make sure you really maximize it.

Last week I showed you an itinerary for an individual FAM that I had taken that was actually to Macon, Georgia and she put in, not even a whole day, between maybe 8:30 or 8:00 and 3:00pm like ten different things and like masterfully. That's one of the really best reasons if you are traveling on your own (even if you're not looking to get things paid for) to reach out to the CVB. They will not only set those things up for you, but they will make the call so that the owner of the restaurant knows that you're coming and even has the meal ready for you when you get there and is ready to answer some questions for you and things like that.



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

Some of the other things on here to take note of, the Georgia Islands. This is another thing where because it's a holiday weekend and we're looking at the islands, things get really hairy. But what I found was that on the coast of Georgia (so that includes Savannah and also Charleston) as long as you are reaching out to these CVBs far enough in advance, and you are very clear about what you need, they will set you up with the right things. In Charleston, I arrived at my hotel and I had a lovely welcome bag from the CVB person and I had all of my passes for all of my attractions there. Even though it was a holiday weekend and she wasn't going to be around, and she wasn't going to be guiding me, she was able to set those up. I had some theatre tickets, I had some historic home tours that we were going to be doing. She was able to set all of those up in a nice schedule for me in advance.

The next thing that I did was a little crazy, but I basically drove from the entire Outer Banks (which is probably like an eight or nine-hour drive) by myself after the other folks with me had left, and I did it in part because I needed to get back for something, but also in part because it was going to be just a really great day because all the tourists had just left at the end of the weekend and I really wanted to be able to get photographs in that environment. What happened was that I had this really long drive and there was this tiny little town in Virginia, on the coast of Virginia that's the peninsula side, so not the main Virginia coast, and it was this B&B and I had been really interested in this town and I reach out to this person and we had everything set up, but I knew I was going to get there really late. So I felt really bad because here I am doing this free stay and I want to chat with her and everything, and I know I'm going to get there really late. What ended up happening was that not only (similarly to what I said about Charleston) was she super super gracious about it and took care of it, but she also gave me suggestions of things to do along the way before I got there, knowing that it was going to be late. She told me "don't forget to stop at blah blah blah because it's the last place you'll be able to get food or gas before you get to us in the evening. If you get to us and you're having trouble finding a parking spot, do this this and that." Obviously if I had been a revenue guest, just a paid guest at the hotel or at the B&B, she still would have been very gracious, but the fact that she knew I was coming, I was a journalist, and she wanted to make sure I had the best experience possible, really made what was a very long day on that trip, because I had this very warm person, I had her cell phone number if I had any problems to help with things even that weren't related just to the stay. That goes back to what I was saying that often the people who are going to take not the best care of you (because I have great relationships with tourism boards) but the people who are going to be thinking really about your user experience are the people who come from a hotel background, because that's what they do with all of their guests.

Then another thing here that's in terms of doing a day trip. So Alexandria is a place that I write about relatively regularly and I usually go to in a non-work-oriented capacity because I have friends there. This is the kind of thing where I knew I was going to be there for a little bit in the afternoon and I reached out to the CVB and we just had a lunch. They said "ok



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

you're going to be here for lunch, great." So they set up a reservation for us, they had a place for me to put my car, they brought a bunch of stuff that they wanted to talk to me about, they asked me what stories I have coming up, and we essentially had like a private version of these PR lunches, that I was saying that you can set up, but just because I was in town. This is the kind of thing where even if you're on a road trip and you're just passing through somewhere, just stopping off in that town and building that relationship can then open the door for future stories.

Something that I had mentioned was that because we wanted to make sure that we weren't putting too much onus on the tourism boards because of the timing of our trip and everything, we made a really comprehensive list of restaurants, small businesses we'd be interested in profiling, attractions that we wanted to check out, and so every time I reached out to a CVB, I was already armed with these lists of different things that I knew that we were interested in. So, I wasn't just going to them and saying "hey I write about food and wine, like what would you recommend I do?" I said "here are some things we've looked at" and then they can come back to you and volley and say "well that's great but it's going to be really busy then or the leaves will have already fallen, so you can't get great pictures, but maybe you want to try something else."

I already mentioned that once you're in, folks always have more things that they want to show you. This can be a really great thing when you go on an individual trip, is that you're going to be on the list for all other group trips, or that as long as you do the coverage that you talked about, they're going to want to have you back. So I have a lot of places that I go to maybe not every year, but every year and half to two years or something to update my research. The thing about these individual trips is that because you're having those meals, because you're having those one-on-ones with people, those tours, you're going to become somebody that they know as a person and that they think about when they're putting things together.

Now something that came up last week that I just want to make sure that we touched on is the chicken-and-egg problem of the assignment letters. What I really recommend about this (and I'm going to do a whole slide on this soon) is what I call the Pitch Portfolio. What this is, is that you're not promising any specific stories, but you're saying "hey I'm starting to set up my trip and these are the places I'm looking at pitching. These are the stories I might do. Let's talk about what's going on in your destination." This is a way where you're showing them the potential coverage that they could get by working with you, but without making any specific promises.

This is really important because I have a little list here that I just want to go through of the things to not do when you are writing people to set up individual trips. One of them is do not



Dream of Travel Writing

How to Set Up an Individual Trip from Scratch

sound like you are writing from the 1800s. Do not sound so formal that you sound like an alien who has just learned English. I'm not saying if like your English is a second language or anything like that, but I have seen these form letters that get passed around between people that they use to set up sponsored trips and they are just really weird. Then I see some of the responses that people get and they're like "oh I don't know if this person is interested in sponsoring me" and I look at their letter and I'm like "why did you say this?" These are people. Talk to them like people. Don't use lowercase hi to start your email, but build a relationship just like you're chatting with the barista at your coffee house ok?

Also, don't superlative drop unless it's true. Don't say you are the most influential, the most loved by CVBs, the most prolific (and I actually saw some letters that said this the other day, so I'm not making this up) unless you really are because they can check.

Don't promise publication unless you edit a website, unless it's your blog that you have control over or another website that you write for. Never make a promise about publication because as a freelancer you just never know what's going to happen. And relatedly, be very careful not to say that you are asking for a hotel night in exchange for coverage because even if you're not presently in one of these associations that we talked about that specifically forbids these things, you might be in the future, and this is a big ethics faux pas. Don't say anything that implies a quid pro quo relationship between you getting something sponsored (whether it's a meal or a tour) and the outcome of the story that you'll publish because that can often be an issue with your editors as well.

On the topic of editors – don't say that you write for a publication that you have not written for in the past or that you have a relationship with an editor that can publish a story in that place if you actually do not. I say this (again) out of actual experience. I've seen people say because they're friends with the editor from BBC Travel that they're going to publish a piece there or something like that. So when you use the pitch portfolio, you're being very honest that this is what you're thinking about pitching, that this is your plan, but you're not saying in any way shape or form that you write for these places. That you will definitely write all of these articles.

Thanks so much everybody. Have a great night!