



Dream of Travel Writing

How To Get The Most Out Of Your Press Trips On The Ground

This week we're going to be talking about how to get the most on the ground out of your press trips. Last week we discussed how to do the research before your trip to make sure that you get the most out of the ground. And so, when we looked at that, we really dug through how to pull out specific ideas from your itinerary, so we're not going to be looking at that so much this week.

In terms of how to get the most on the ground out of your press trips, this is really going to be more a look at specifically some itineraries that I've pulled from a lot of you guys who are here on the call today as well as best practices. So, we're going to walk through some fresh itineraries because I feel like I've used my itineraries with you guys to death from different trips that I've been on. So, I've got some from some of you and I'm actually a little worried because I have the destination branding on them and I didn't write the destination's permission. So, just pretend you don't see those logos on there.

So, there's three main things that I want to talk about today and like I said, first we're going to talk about the more high-level best practices. And part of that is going to be, also this second point here, how to troubleshoot some of the bad situations that come up. And in order to make sure, you know like I said, that I'm not using the same examples also all of the time for that, I had some of you guys send me some very less than ideal situations that you have found yourselves in recently.

Again, if you're just joining us, the handouts on the side. We've got a mix of some PDFs as well as a word document, so make sure you download those so that when we get to them, we can discuss. And it looks like there's two itineraries. One of them is the preliminary and one is the final and so she sent us both so we can see how those change which is really instructive. So, go ahead and make sure that for those first two which are for the same trip, but are slightly different, you download both of those.

As I said, we've got a lot great content coming from various among you guys and people who will be listening in on the call afterwards. And what I did with the itineraries is I didn't over look at them or over research them before myself because I wanted to come to them as you guys would, you know, getting it fresh from the person organizing that trip and figuring out what to do with it. So, when we get to walking through the itineraries, that's what we're going to do. We're going to open them up, we're going to look at them together, we're going to pretend the PR person just sent them to us, and we're going to figure out what we would do to make sure that we can optimize that.

I really want you to think about when you're talking about how to get the most out of your press trips is looking for those things that you wouldn't typically notice as well as looking for what makes that destination a place that people would go out of their way to travel to.

Part of the reason that I have really honed this over the years is that, as a lot of you guys know, I had a full-time job and I left to become and a travel writer and I really wanted to figure out how to make that sustainable so that I could pay for my own trips and I didn't have



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to just go on free travel and I couldn't make sure everywhere I was going was a place that I had chosen to be and everything that I was doing when I was there was something that I had chosen. And the six-figure travel writing roadmap really came out of that. It really came out of helping show other folks how to get their travel writing to a point where it was sustainable enough that they could be making choices about where they travel.

While today the itineraries that we're going to be looking at tend to be for group press trips, I just want to emphasize that what we're talking about you can do on individual trips, on individual itineraries. And yesterday I was on an individual itinerary here in Oregon South of Portland doing something similar where a lot of people come to Portland for the food or because it's weird or whatever and I wanted to get some more research under my belt on the things that you can do outside of Portland that even in and among themselves are worth taking the trip after from wherever you live.

I'm bringing into this call today part of the fact that I was just doing this yesterday, so I might throw some examples of my own trip from yesterday in as well with the ones that we're going to be talking about from you guys. So, before we get into -- oh, how great, one of you is in Portland right now too. I'm literally going to my flight after this, unfortunately. All right, so like I said, before we get into the feedback and the itineraries and everything from you guys about your trips, I just want to talk very quickly about why it is that we would ever come home from a press trip without story material in the first place. Because if you think about it, they've spent this money and then they've spent time paying PR people to set up these itineraries, do all these things so that you can go there and get your stories.

What it is for them for you to come home without anything to work with. It just seems silly that there would be a situation in which the people who are spending the money to organize this trip would not do absolutely everything in their power to make sure that each person on that trip comes home with something. And part of that to be honest, and we've talked about this in the very first call about press trips and what to expect, is that a lot of the folks organizing these trips, they might have never done this before. They might be new to PR, they might be new to travel, but in some way, shape, or form, you actually know more about press trips than they do. And for sure, in many cases, you know more about how to put together a blog post or an article than they do, even if you think that you have not been doing this for very long. I guarantee you, you will know a lot more about this than many of the PR people that you will encounter, especially if they're new to their job or if they're in a different country where the focus on marketing destinations has only recently become something people are spending money on.

You will often find yourself in situations where it's not that people don't want you or don't need you to get a story, but they simply don't know what on earth they should be doing. And so, they are trying to do whatever they think works and it has nothing to do with what they should actually be doing. So, some of the ways that this often comes up is that there's poor initial planning for the trip and I'm actually going to talk about this in two flavors. I'm going to talk about sponsor/attendee focus fit in a minute which is different, but poor initial



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planning tends to be things like on the PR side it can be an itinerary that doesn't reflect what the actual attendees are interested in. But if you think about it, this means it's a PR person needs to know in advance as they're finalizing the itinerary what each of those people wants and what each of those people would write about and sometimes they don't know to ask that. And even if they do know to ask it, they don't know to ask it to the level that it'll help them with their trip planning.

Sometimes it's just a function of the person who chose the individuals for the trip, who looked at a bunch of people's applications or what not and in their head, maybe they had one person who had done a lot of great work for them after a trip in the past or maybe they just have a concept of what their ideal blogger looks like which isn't actually the right fit for the itinerary they're putting together. So, there's a lot of different ways that you can end up on a trip that from the PR perspective, is not going to be super fruitful for you. And as we looked at last week, there's a lot of research that you can do in terms of checking out magazine markets, checking out things in the destination, digging really deeply into the back stories of the locations that you'll be visiting on your trip.

There's a lot of research that you can do to help maximum some of those bad PR planning situations. So sometimes when you end up on a trip and at the end you feel like you don't have anything, it can come back to you not having done some of that other research before your own trip. But a lot of things are outside of your control like weather and one of the stories that we're going to look at later that came from you guys is about this. It's about what happens when you're supposed to be in a destination that's really predicated on having great weather and outdoor activities and that just all goes to crap and you have essentially start over being there in the worst possible situations.

This is actually something that I think I'm lucky and touch wood, not that I'm super superstitious, but I think that I'm lucky that I've never had a press trip where the weather was just completely the worst possible situation, but it seems to always happen on my own trips where I am paying and the PR people are not paying. That I went recently to the Netherlands and we spent five days on a Gouda farm in the, it's actually called "Goo-rah" or something if you pronounce it correctly, but outside of the city of Gouda where the cheese comes from and I think maybe one and a half days, a trip composed of like half days here and here. It didn't rain and it was actually quite cold as well and you don't want to be mucking about a farm in the rain if you can help it.

These things happen and as I mentioned in the blog post and the newsletter proceeding this call today, a lot of what you can do in the worst, worst situations is just go back and do phone interviews later and we'll talk a little bit about that. But as I mentioned, there's some things like this misunderstanding of focus background that can be mitigated. There can be, you know, either if you thought the trip was going to be one thing and then get there and find it out it's something else or the PR person thought that you researched a particular type of thing and it turns out that your interests are something different. There's a lot that you can do once you get there to switch gears and that's what we're going to look at in a minute.



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One thing that I mentioned on the first call and I wanted to throw this in there for those of you who weren't with us for the one on what to expect during press trips is this concept of the rock star being catered to so at some point in your career if you have not already, you will find yourself on a trip where there is essentially one person who is "more important." Like they write for a bigger outlet or they already know the PR people in the destination, but they're just getting more of the attention. The itinerary seems to be more about what they want to do or what they want to write about it and it almost seems like you are the third, fourth, seventh wheel on someone's individual fam.

When that happens, and this is going to be one of the only situations where I would really advise this and we're going to talk in a bit about why not to do this later, but this is one of the only situations in which I would really advise you to politely ask if you can simply go off on your own and do other things. If it's really clear that all of the attention and the choosing of what to do and when to leave and how quickly to go through a tour is based on one person that's kind of like the star horse and jockey of this horse race of who's going to get press for the destination, politely ask if it's okay if you can just go on your own and do some other things and make it very clear that you don't need anyone with you and you're very happy to go do this on your own and you just want to make sure that you get your stories and they get their stories and everyone gets their stories without overburdening the PR person.

Now, one thing that I want to touch on, because I think a lot of us don't think about it that I also mentioned a bit in the webinar in what to expect on press trips, is the sponsor/attendee fit. So, when PR people are putting these itineraries together there's a lot of negotiation and concessions that needs to happen to make sure that this group of travel writers has somewhere to sleep and somewhere to eat every night and every meal and then along the way, different attractions that fall at the different times and there's tour guides that are there and being paid to be there at certain times. And so, what that means is that there's just so, so much begging and saying "Okay great. Well, if you do this, then I can do this" that goes on and what can happen, completely not because the PR person thinks that you want to do a certain thing or need to do a certain thing, is that you'll find yourself at hotels or restaurants or even attractions that just seem like an absolute waste of your time.

It's important to realize that sometimes the PR person hasn't done that just because they think you're going to like it. They've done it because they had a sudden hole in their schedule because the really amazing farm that they wanted you to visit recently found out that it was going to have to throw away all its cheese because it had some contamination issue and they're all hands on deck to basically start their whole operation from scratch, so they can't take you there. Or that they wanted to take you to a very cool venue which was supposed to be open by now and then when they put it in the trip. Originally, it was supposed to be open by now, but it just hasn't opened. They're still finishing construction, it's like a hard hat zone, and they just can't take you there.

Sometimes things like that happen and they just have to throw something in which is easy and maybe is an attraction that is like very known or very uninteresting, but just to give you



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guys something to do for a short time. And so, this is another situation where you can carefully, and especially if it wasn't in the original itinerary. If it was, then you have a little bit less to stand on here, but if it wasn't in the original itinerary and it seems incredibly uninteresting for what you're doing. You can always ask. In that case, if the item is a late edition, if it's okay if you do something else and I recommend inserting some ideas.

Like say you're in Israel and there is -- I'm trying to think of something that would be boring in Israel -- so say you're in Jerusalem and there's going to be a walking tour of the Tower of David and say you have not only visited this venue on your own, but you did a piece where you talked to a bunch of archeologists and you have a ton of experience about this thing. And it wasn't on the original itinerary or you would have mentioned it. And now you've just found out in the final itinerary that there's going to be this tour and it would really be not a great use of your time and less information than you already know.

You say instead "I notice that the Yehuda Market which is the big food market, isn't on our itinerary, but you had that in the initial description and that's something that I really wanted to do and I have already done this piece about the Tower of David. So, would you mind if I instead go visit this other venue on my own? There's no need for somebody to go with me while you guys go to that. So, these are the two situations when there's clearly somebody who's getting all the attention and they don't really care about your story and when there's some things that have been added to itinerary, especially if they've been changed last minute, that really aren't a fit for you and especially if they've taken off something that you want to be doing when you should politely ask if it's okay, if they would mind if you do something else instead.

When these situations come up, I talked about a couple different ways that you can wriggle out of them, but I want to look at some more sort of big picture, high-level ways that you can change your habits, your way of looking at things on your trips, the things that you bring with you when you go out during the day, and the scripts that you use to deal with PR people in order to mitigate these situations, and also just the little tiny situations that come up. Like, if any of you have been on a trip, I'm sure you've run into the thing where the PR person says that you're going to have free time in the afternoon and you don't. There's just so many things like that can just come and muck up the works and we're going to look at some specific ones that have happened to some of you in a minute, but first I want to talk about some techniques and then we're going to, like I said, look at some unfortunate situations that have happened to some of you and how to deal with those specific things, and then go into some itineraries and look at how to maximize those.

Have you guys heard me talk before about the pocket cheat sheet? It's something that we've mentioned on our blog and a couple times in some different webinars and you can find it on our blog at [Dream of Travel Writing/Pocket Cheat Sheet](#). The idea that when you go to a destination, yes, you have certain things that you have said "When I'm here, I want to be working on this type of story for this type of magazine", but this is a more general list of article ideas that you can just for whatever. So, I recommend that you all make your own



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pocket cheat sheet. Not just because I don't want to give you one and have you all pitching the same magazines, but because the types of things that each of you are interested in every destination is going to change.

Some of you are very interested in food. Some of you are very interested in finding quirky, interesting cultural things in the places that you visit. Some of you are very interested in checking out the outdoor destinations. Some of you are more interested in the type of things that locals do versus the type of things that a family traveling to a destination could do. So, each of you is going to have your own pocket cheat sheet, but what it should be composed of is a list of say, 10 or 12 magazine sections. So, not a specific magazine, but a specific section in a magazine that has very clear structure to it about how to pitch that's applicable to a lot of destinations.

A really easy example of this is there's a magazine from Hoffman Media Group which does, I think it's Southern Lady and Southern Living and they do Taste of Home and a lot of hospitality-oriented magazines for an audience in the Southeastern U.S. And this magazine from them called Tea Time has two articles that are travel-oriented and one of them is a very simple round-up of the tea houses and tea shops and tea rooms in a destination. And they include about five in each piece and they have an interview with the owners. You've had the tea, you talk about what the tea is like, you talk about anything seasonal that they do certain times of year, perhaps why they opened the tea shop, and in the beginning there's an intro that kind of describes the tea situation and why you would want to take tea in this city.

This is the kind of thing where if you like tea, you might notice that there's tea shops places, but even if you're not a tea fanatic who sits down and checks out all of the tea rooms somewhere, you would be shocked to find how many major cities will have a certain number of places where there's high tea or that there's just interesting team shops. And you can usually come up with five pretty much everywhere. Even in smaller tier cities like Savannah, I was able to come up with something like this.

This is an example of the kind of thing that's not just a straight city guide. It's not just here's where to sleep, where to eat, and what to do in this city, though there are a lot of those and a lot of our Friday Freebies on the Dream of Travel Writing blog we have a lot of different city guide examples. But this is the kind of thing where it's a city guide through a certain lens that you can probably find in a lot of cities.

When you put your pocket cheat sheet together, I recommend scoping out some different magazine sections that are like that, that are very applicable, but very specific so that when you are somewhere, if the other stories that you want to work on have fallen through, as you are walking around the destination and seeing things you can say "Hey, this blog has some really cool artisans and boutiques and a restaurant that has a different menu every day." This would be nice for a far section called One Great Block where they talk about an up and coming neighborhood somewhere that has a lot of interesting options very close together and profile each of them with about 20 to 50 words.



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This is the kind of thing where when you have that in your pocket, so to say, on your phone or on your computer, as you are literally there walking around on the tours on your press trip or you're being driven around or you're chatting with somebody at a venue. When they mention these other random businesses that are around or when you see them, it will set off a little light for you that these are some things that you can match to the magazine sections on your cheat sheet. And this is really important and I'm going to talk more about this when we look at the itineraries, but it's really important to keep in mind when you go somewhere that even though from the itinerary and from afar, not the magazine, but this sense.

From afar, you've planned ideas and articles and magazine sections that you want to look at pitching. You will always find new things when you get there and they will almost always be better than what you thought of, but there's things that aren't online or they're too new to have really been visible through searching or they've been around for a long time and so they don't even have a website, but they're a fantastic suit maker in Naples that's been passed down through the family for six generations.

There's things like this that you won't see them unless you keep your eye out and you won't have a good idea of what to do with them if you don't have some magazine sections in the back of your head that are pretty universally applicable. So, my very biggest tip is that no matter how many ideas for articles you have queued up based on your itinerary, have this general cheat sheet because it will sort of create a way to force yourself to keep your eyes open as you're walking and driving around and talking to people in a destination.

For instance, if you are on a beer-oriented itinerary, you might have some beer-oriented article ideas that are all set. They have to feed you sometime, right? So, you're going to be perhaps having beer tastings where you have the beer, the brewer, and the chef who's created the food talking about how they've created these dishes for you. The dish is supposed to highlight the beet and so on and so forth. And so, certainly, you could go back to beer publications that you're looking at writing about this trip for and say "Hey, I have some good pairing ideas", blah, blah, blah. But what you can also do is then you can say "Oh cool. I hadn't thought so much about the food angle because I didn't know that would be a thing, but let me talk more to this chef about how he uses beer in his food and then take that to a food magazine."

As you start to use the cheat sheet to force yourself to keep your eyes open, then your ears start to prick up more frequently for these things because you start to see and feel when there's more. You start to feel when somebody who is telling you that they started this chocolate shop late in life after they had a consultancy helping skydivers. You're like "Whoa. You sound very interesting. Let's talk a little more because you sound like a profile." And don't tell a person they sound like a profile. I think I might've done it sometimes and they look at you a little quizzically, but once you start to use the cheat sheet to make yourself see ideas that aren't already seeing, you'll start to see more of them everywhere. So, that's really my biggest, biggest piece of advice in terms of getting more on the ground that all of you can do no matter what situation you're in, no matter what the trip is.



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The second thing: sleep in advance. This is actually really hard and that's why I put this on here because it seems so obvious and it's not something that's actually easy, even though it seems obvious. Because we probably have other writing, other work, stuff on our blog, family things that we have to get done before we go on this press trip and essentially give all of our time and attention over to somebody we've never met who may or may not manage it wisely. So, it's very common for you to be working really hard and then to have a crappy flight where there's a delay or you have to fly a redeye in economy and you're squished in the middle of the middle between two huge guys that will not share the armrest. These things happen and so you should basically expect, no matter how beautiful the itinerary looks, that you will be run completely ragged during your trip and that getting there will probably suck, even if it looks okay. Just assume that it will suck.

Essentially, imagine before you go that you need to have such a store of sleep and patience and energy that you can really surmount anything. And the thing is if you have been on press trips, you probably have told yourself "Oh my God, next time I'm never going to do this", but it's really hard to just tell ourselves "Okay. Let me look at my calendar. This is the day that I'm leaving on the press trip and on this day I am going to make sure that I am in bed at 10:00 no matter what because the next day I'm going to be packing and I'm probably going to be up late and try to finish things." So, you have to start backtracking on your itinerary to make sure that when you show up, you are able to put up with stuff, to notice things, to have the energy and the attention to notice things.

When you're there, I talked a little bit when I was talking about noticing things. I said when you're driving around, when you're on a tour, but also just when you are having conversations. And this is one of those things that I'm always surprised how often I'm the only one having sidebar interviews with these fascinating people who are giving us tours. So, I get so much material by, not annoyingly though, don't be the annoying one, but by being up close to the tour guide or whatever tour we're on so that as we're moving from one room of the museum to the next or if we're on a truffle hunting demonstration. As we're moving from where they're giving us the initial spiel to where the dogs are going to find the truffles. As we move from point A to point B, by standing near the tour guide and walking with them I have these little micro moments either for them to just spontaneously say something that's great for me to ask them how did they start doing this? How long has, if it's a museum, how long has the museum had this docent program? Or how did they decide to start offering these really extensive menu of different tours? Or something like this.

By having those little micro moments, I'm able to ask questions offline because when you're on a tour, especially on a super packed itinerary, nobody likes the person that is asking 20 questions every time the tour guide finishes their spiel and says "Any questions?" and they really mean "We're going to move on to the next stop now." Nobody likes that person. So, unless you have a question that everybody needs to know because it's really confusing, I really recommend doing these little sidebars, walking somewhere with them and asking that question then because not only do you stop from the potential of being that person who's



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"holding things up by asking questions even if they're important", but you get that information. And not to say that other people don't get it, but you get that piece of information and you get to ask the follow-up questions.

If you ask a question on a tour or to the PR person when the whole group is together, you might be interested in something and ask about it and then they say something and you want to know more or you're not quite sure what they said, but somebody else is hijacking the conversation and then asking follow-up questions on this. So, by doing these sidebars, this allows you to get the best information for you. To make sure that you understand everything the guide has said. To make sure that you get to ask your follow-ups. Is it unfair to the other people? No, as long as you're not pushing somebody out to go be the one having that sidebar conversation.

I have never seen a trip where people were tripping over each other to get sidebar interviews. There always seems to be enough walking from point A to point B that people shift a little bit and you get to ask the tour guide a question now, somebody else's later, you can ask the PR person a question now while someone else is talking to the tour guide. There's just so many opportunities for this, but you need to maximize them because especially when for instance, have any of you guys been on a Context Travel tour? Do you know Context Travel? It's a company that focuses on having people who are professors or art historians and things like that do their tours.

I've had a really mixed bag of context tours which is why I don't super write about them or recommend them per se, but I've had some really excellent context tours where we had somebody who was a professor. So, she knew how to tour and touch in with what people are interested in, but super, super knowledgeable because she had been an archeologist in Greece for 20 years. In those situations, it is just a shame to miss out on any opportunity for a sidebar that you can because even if you don't know what this person might say, by just being there and just asking them open-ended questions, they will come up with fascinating anecdotes and often, those will lead you to a whole new story idea that's brilliant. That's really great. That's super easily salable that you would never have had because they wouldn't say it in a tour.

But they just happen to mention as you guys are walking and you said like "Oh, how was your weekend?" They say "Oh, you know, I just found this new dig. It was completely random. It was in somebody's back yard and they sold the house and the new people found it and the previous owners just hadn't told anybody about it" and they tell you about this amazing thing. And so, often, it happens to me when I teach and when I coach, it happens to everybody who speaks in any fashion. You are presenting a narrow slice of what you know about any topic at a given time and for us as writers, we want to make sure that we get as many slices to see as many potential story options as we can from these really qualified sources.

I just have a question that I want to pop into about the cheat sheets. Somebody was asking about how to find the cheat sheet on the database. It's not on the database, it's on our blog on



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the Dream of Travel Writing site. So it's dream of travel writing slash blog if you want to search around, or it's dream of travel writing slash pocket slash cheat sheet. Okay, so back to the best practices.

Asking for exceptions. We covered this earlier. For any of those of you who weren't with us by the way, make sure you download the handouts. We're going to look at those soon. There's three PDFs and one Word file and in terms of asking for exceptions, like I said, this is something that you want to do with extreme respect and judgment, if that's a word. But you want to do it judiciously, you don't want to do it too often. You don't want to be opting out of things on the trip. That's a really horrible thing to do, okay? Like, I told you before and I'll say them again some situations in which it's okay to do that, but generally, if you have shown up on a trip and at some point before this moment in which you are doing an activity you were told that you were doing that activity and you have not previously discussed with the PR person or the organizing person that you aren't going to do a certain activity and why, do not just not show up. Do not just say "I don't feel like it" or "I don't like this" or whatever. You need to talk about that with people in advance because then the PR person has the opportunity to see if that's how most people feel and change the itinerary.

I was on a trip and I'm going to keep it quite vague to protect the parties involved, but I was on a trip where it was self-driving. So, we didn't have a handler. We didn't have a PR person with us and I have a bad back, as many of you know, and they had added last minute in the final version of the itinerary. So, we had it before we got there. They had added a whole afternoon of horseback riding and I wrote them as soon as I saw this and I said "I can't do that", "I'm very sorry", "This was not in the original itinerary or else I would have told you before" and they said "Okay, great. Fine." And then when we got to the place, I was the one who wasn't going on this, was the only one sitting in the hotel lobby when this really sweet, really enthusiastic guy showed up to take us out for the horseback rides.

And I said "Oh, great." I had already written to the person that I can't do it for health reasons, but let me go find the other people for you and the other people on my trip simply stayed in their hotel room and didn't even come out. I think maybe there was one that was a couple and they had sort of talked amongst themselves about it, but they didn't even come tell the guy. They didn't try to tell the PR person. This lovely guy was just sitting in the lobby for like a half hour or 40 minutes and then I went and tracked down everybody and asked what was going on and apologized to him profusely and he was really sad because he had planned a horseback ride and a picnic and he was going to tell us all about this amazing beautiful area we were in and the history.

And these people just completely missed out on it. And mostly, it was just because they didn't feel like doing it that day. They wanted to walk around. And that just sucks because, like I said, a lot of begging has to be done to set up the different things that you're doing on your trip. And I know that none of you are the types of people that would just stay in your room and not go out, but it's important to remember that there might be other people who do feel like that and if there is something that genuinely isn't a fit for the group, that you're doing



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everybody a favor by helping the PR person come to realize that so that something else can be organized if possible.

In terms of asking for exceptions, like I mentioned earlier, the two times that I do recommend using judiciously this practice is if there's a rock star person that's getting all the attention and the itinerary's really based around what they want. Or if something has changed really dramatically and what you initially wanted to research isn't there and they've substituted it with something that you already know or that isn't of interest with you. And you really need to, in that case, use the peg of "Well, this is something that I wanted to write about. We're not doing it anymore. I already know this thing, I'm already familiar with it. So, why don't I just on my own go during the time when the rest of the group is at that other venue?"

In terms of maximizing your time, we've started to look at a couple different ways to do this, but maximizing your break time is something that I wanted to look at. Now, actually having those breaks is something that doesn't always happen. It's very common to have an itinerary where they very often mystically say "Oh, we want to make sure you have two hours in the afternoon to rest." That never happens. They never let you rest, don't believe it, but sometimes, especially in hotel tours, you'll have really a lot of free time. Like really a lot, as in they just give you an entire day on the property with nothing scheduled.

Now, in a perfect world where you weren't on a trip, you would sleep a lot, maybe go to the pool, maybe get a massage, but you are there for a reason on somebody's dime to get stories. So, what, when you do have breaks, can you do to maximize that time? I really recommend, especially if it's a hotel property, to go talk to the staff. To talk to people of the itinerary or at the activity center to talk to the concierge and get ideas from them because just like I was saying about the archeologist giving you a tour, they might have something really cool that's not open to the public yet that they can tell you about and maybe give you a preview of. They might be able to just give you an impromptu behind the scenes tour.

If you have breaks and you can manage it, you don't need to hop on your computer right away, I really recommend going outside of the people organizing your trip. To people in the destination that are knowledgeable. Even if you're not staying in a hotel that has a concierge, you can try going to a super luxurious hotel down the street and just chatting up their concierge. I've heard a lot of people say that this -- no writers, but actually hotel people -- that this is totally fine as long as they're not dealing with customers from their own hotel at that time.

Get outside of the current pool of the vice that you're in and go to other destination experts and have them recommend to you what you should see. Get more perspectives. But then the second part is defending your break time. So, this is a little tough because itineraries are not perfect. Tours go longer than they should. There's too many bathroom breaks getting from point A to point B. There's a variety of reasons that your trip can run behind and these break times can be eaten into, but there's also a subset of them that are bad reasons. That are because the tour person, the PR person, your handler, whoever did not stick to the schedule.



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Don't feel bad about reminding whoever it is that's currently setting your time pace that you do have a schedule. Don't all sit back because the tour guide is droning on and on forever and just think about how annoying this is and how you're going to miss out on some other thing. Be the person who helps everybody else have a better trip as well as yourself by speaking up to the tour guide or to the PR person. And, you know, the tour guide doesn't necessarily know. Good tour guide, when they get there, this happened to me on the trip yesterday. We showed up a very fabulous winery and I could tell that my host was changing the trip as we went along, that he had completely deviated from the itinerary.

I totally didn't know when we were supposed to be anywhere and when we got there, she said "How much time do I have?" That was her first question. She was like "I'd love for you to do this, this, and this, but you tell me what you want to do and how much time you have." And then I said "Okay. Well, these are things that I want to do" and she said "Okay, great" and then she put together her head like, the order in which we were going to go around her property.

That's how a good PR person or a good tour guide will do it, but not everybody is that. Not everybody knows that. Not everybody is thinking about that. So, feel free when you get there and you introduce yourself to the tour guide so you can have those sidebar conversations, to say "Hey, thanks so much for having us. I see on the itinerary that we're here until 1:00. What's your schedule for us for the next half hour? What are we going to accomplish in that time?" To help get that person thinking that they only have you for that long and how they can maximize it and make sure that they haven't shown you only half of the venue in that time.

This kind of gets into also the next point of being focused ruthless and unapologetic about it. If you are in the kind of situation where the itinerary, like I was talking about, about my trip yesterday, is super amorphous and you can see that it's changing the PR person is cutting things right and left and not discussing it with you guys and you just show up at a venue that you didn't realize you were going to show at, go to that handler, that PR person, that driver, whoever and say "Look. I can see that the schedule is changing right now on the ground and this doesn't work for me because I need 100 percent to be at this, this, and this place. So, can you tell me right now if those things are not going to happen anymore? Because if so, then I need to make sure that I get myself there separately so I can visit those places."

Be super ruthless about the things that you discussed with the PR people in advance that you needed to visit. Don't let them just shuffle them off and leave you scrambling. And again, this is the kind of thing that you would think would be very basic, but it's not, and we're going to get into that in a second. So, work the PR and the sources goes back a little bit to what I was saying about the sidebar interviews, but it also means that you want to get them on your side. You can't be ruthless if you haven't made them like you in the first because they're not going to do that favor for you. They're not going to go out of their way.



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I've spoken in previous webinars about thanking people and how I'm always shocked when we go on really packed itineraries and the people, the travel writers, don't individually and graciously thank every guide that we have along the way and every business owner who's welcomed us. Make sure that you do that because like I said, you might be the only one, but that person has changed their schedule. Like maybe if that museum isn't open on Tuesday and they just opened it for you guys. They have often gone out of their way to accommodate you, but they're definitely really curious about what's going to happen from this visit.

Always take the time to talk to them and also to set expectations. We looked at this before about how people are increasingly asking writers to provide the photos that they took when they were there with an air of expectation that those photos will be given freely. But by making that relationship, you can help to set those expectations so that you don't have negative consequences down the line, but you also are in a better position to ask them if you need things, like you need more information or you need them to set up an interview for you. And like I said, you might be the only one, so they'll probably remember you.

Let's get into some of these things that you guys have written me in about. I have included the verbatim here in case on the replay of the call, you want to pause and read the whole thing in the words of the writer, but I'm going to just highlight some bullet points here. And like I said, you can go back in the replay of the call to look at these. So, this particular trip was one which was really unfortunate that they just had crap weather and it was supposed to be outside. And I believe this was also a Spring/Summer sort of trip, so it was really -- this is one that happened previously -- and so, it was really surprising and unfortunate that that happened.

One thing in particular that I want to point out here is that she starts by saying that she had them book her trip, as in the flight, and that it's made her really reconsider having PR people book her flights because they got her something that was indirect because it was supposed to be less expensive and the flight was very delayed. And she actually had to unexpectedly spend the night in her layover city. And that's the kind of thing where when you're traveling on somebody's dime and you have to figure out how to shell out for a hotel room on short notice because you're stuck somewhere can be really, really difficult to negotiate.

Anytime you're going on a trip and someone else is booking the flights, this is a situation in which you should be ruthless because you need to emphasize to them if this thing goes wrong, I will miss an entire day of what you are bringing me for. Is that really worth it to you? And if you want, you can even check the delay statistic for those flights and things like that, but it's definitely something to check out because it can really negatively impact your trip from that sleep perspective and attention and noticing things on the ground which is hugely important to getting the most out of your trip.

Now, this is the kind of thing where like I said, she had very bad weather, but it was supposed to be beach, biking, jet-skiing, and of course, people wanted to take photos. And you are not going to be doing that in this kind of weather. And so, she said they had to cancel outside



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dinner plans. Basically, a lot of the trip, they didn't know what was going on. So, if you're in a situation like that where because of weather or because of an emergency situation or because of construction that's not planned for, something like that where the majority of your itinerary becomes impossible or next to impossible, hit the internet, if you haven't already and make your own hot list of what else you would like to do. And just present them to the PR person and say "You know what, I know we can't do all these other things and I know we probably can't do everything on this list, but these are some things that I came up with that I would like to do since we can't do what we were supposed to do. And I'm happy to do some of them on my own and I'm happy to figure when to do them, but I'd love to work with you to re-plan things either just for myself, or for the group."

That's the kind of situation where like I said, it's not even that the itinerary has changed, but when you get there, things just aren't feasible. But make a new one. Don't rely on the PR person to do that because they're probably just losing it that this has happened when they have these writers here and maybe it's their only trip of the year. So, she was saying that one day they couldn't do bike rides, so they shifted instead to go to a museum. And they had a tour where they skipped one part of the tour in order to focus on another one. So, a lot of these things where they traded back and forth between one thing or the other, the PR people and the tour guides were making those decisions in the moment. And if she had wanted to write about that lighthouse that they skipped on the dolphin tour, she's going to have to say "Look PR person, I need to go to the lighthouse. If I can't go now, can we go some other time?"

There's a lot of sticking up for yourself and your ability to get stories that needs to happen in these situations because they have a lot of people to think about. Not just you and the attendees, but all of the stakeholders that agreed to do things that now those things aren't happening. They've got to apologize to those people, see if those people can re-book, find new people, it's just a mess. So, you have to step up in terms of taking care of your interest in a way that helps the PR people, okay?

One thing that she said and this was kind of about the original itinerary, was that it wasn't very cohesive. They were picked up in one place and then they stayed in that place, but they did day trips other places. So, they ended up spending a lot of time in the car. And this can happen and like I said, this goes back to all these negotiations that PR people have to make. And sometimes that's just where they can get you the hotel and there's nothing that can be done about it. And so, I wanted to point out this is the kind of thing where it comes to when you stay in one city, but you have to go back and forth between a lot of other ones. The PR person probably knows that's not ideal and they can't do anything about it, but it might be that they thought it would be better for you as the writer to have a base.

You can mention this to them for next time. You can definitely mention it, but I wouldn't necessarily ask about changing it on the trip that you're on because that might not be within their power. So, this is one where she also had mentioned that a lot of people stayed behind/



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opted out of activities once they arrived or they were whining because they couldn't get onto a particular thing that they wanted to do.

This is why like I said, it's really important that when you're sticking up for yourself about doing these various activities or not doing activities that you shouldn't be doing, you make sure to always make a win-win, preferably win. Like it's a win for the rest of the group, it's a win for the PR person, and it's win for you in order to not be that person that nobody wants to be on a trip with.

This next writer's trip that I wanted to look at is the one that I mentioned in the newsletter and the blog post for today's call where it was just a super unfortunate situation. The PR person had never planned a trip before and her father passed away before the trip happened. So, it was really just one of these worst case scenarios where if her father hadn't died, then you could probably have helped her a little bit to make the trip better, but it was a situation where it was hard to make those kind of helpful suggestions. So, some of the issues with this trip was that the days were too packed and one person called it "drive-by journalism" because they often only had 30 minutes at a place. They had absolutely no free time over five days. Five days, every morning until every evening. They were doing way too many things in one day. She's saying 30 minutes at attractions that typically required two to three hours.

Then one of the worst parts was that they didn't receive the itinerary until the day before and a lot of things on that itinerary were even things that she wanted to do. So, imagine having -- and this may have happened to some of you -- but imagine having five days where you have to do a bunch of stuff that's really stressful and really packed that's not even interesting to you. I just want to go back to one of the slides. She said one participant left and didn't show up again until the end because of this. That's how useless this itinerary was.

What do you do in this situation? She says the days were really long, we had to meet up most mornings by 7:00 a.m. and didn't wrap up until 11:00 p.m. So, it made it really difficult to digest information and get notes and everybody was really crabby. Like I had mentioned, she said that the attractions were too well-known. There wasn't anything different or off the beaten path and she said worst of all, the organizers didn't even know the itinerary. They didn't know any of the restaurants before. They hadn't visited any of the attractions. They didn't know any of the specific details about how to get in and out of the venue or the hours.

This is the kind of situation like I said, in her case, the PR person was in a really bad situation and that can make it really difficult. But that one guy just left and came back and got some good stories. That's kind of the extreme, right? You don't want to be the person who just disappears for a couple days unless you've been really communicative about that. So, how would you deal with an itinerary like this? I think that in this case, it's difficult to just opt out of a couple activities if you have gotten itinerary and agreed to it even if it didn't have free time.



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One of the things that you can do is perhaps try to say as you're out during the day "Great. Do you mind if I just go for the beginning of this tour and then spend 20 minutes on the bus writing up some story ideas? Because I feel like I haven't been able to think through the attractions we've been to." You can create little pockets for yourself that don't involve going all the way back to the hotel. You can even just say "Hey, I'm going to go to the bathroom" and secretly go sit somewhere for 20 minutes. There's just a lot of little low-impact ways on a really crazy worst-case scenario trip like this that you can start to create space for yourself without pulling what that other guy did which is just disappearing.

The bathroom trick is a good one. Saying that you just really need a sec and where's the cafe. Or you can say "I'd love to go in here at the beginning of this tour, but this attraction isn't really a great fit for me, so I'm just going to work on some other story ideas while you're there." But don't just stay home. Don't not get on the bus, even in an itinerary like this because it's one of these situations where once you get that itinerary and you don't opt out of things the second that itinerary gets there, you have tacitly agreed to be doing this stuff.

Okay. So, let's pop over to our other handouts really quickly. We've got the Sweet Home Alabama trip which is one of the PDFs and I'm going to open them all in my window and then we're going to flip over to see my computer. So, we've got the Sweet Home Alabama trip as a PDF and then we've got the Mexico trips and as was mentioned earlier, for the Mexico trips we have two different versions of the itinerary. So, there's one which is the final trip and one which is the original itinerary that they received.

First, I want to look at those two next to each other. So I'm just pulling up the preliminary and the final itineraries. And I'm going to switch over so that we can see my whole computer of craziness. So, now you should be seeing two different Mexico itineraries next to each other and I know they're going to look a little small for you guys, so make sure that you also download the handouts from the handouts screen.

All right. Great, so we've got these two. Now, the reason I wanted to put them heads up like this side by side is you immediately start to see things that have changed. You start to see that here there's a note "Credit card will be required upon check-in for any incidentals." Now, here goes lots more notes. There's "It's best not to bring dollars for logistical transportation regions, you'll be assigned a number along with your badge." That immediately makes me think "How many people are on this trip? This sounds like we're getting a little crazy." And then you'll see that items on Sunday have already started to change.

Originally, the transportation was 6:30. Now the transportation is 4:45. This is the kind of thing that when I get this I would immediately double check and make sure that that makes sense for me. So Carrie is saying this itinerary came from her and she's saying that there 100 people on this trip. And so, that's part of why everybody had a number. So, let's jump over into Monday here. So on Monday, again, we're looking and things have started to change. So, we've got 10:00, but then this one says 10:30, but soon 11:30. So, everything else seems to still be kind of moving along in the same time.



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Then we've got class, lunch, okay, things are matching up except for this. Now, the transportation is on here, but the location is the same. So, it seems like in this case, they've just started to add more levels of detail, so that's fine. Things aren't changing super drastically and I'm not going to go through line by line on the rest of these things, but I just want you to kind see the level of checking that you should be doing to make sure that you don't miss the boat on speaking up about something missing from your itinerary that's really important for you.

Like Carrie said, this is a group trip with 100 people. So, this is very different than a lot of the itineraries that you might go on, but it's not unheard of. I'm blanking on a name, but there's a company that just organizes press trips for destinations. They're whole thing is that they organize press trips. They have a list of writers and magazine editors and staff writers for magazines that they just invite all the time. And you'll go on this trip and there might 20 or 30 people just in your one bus. You might even be with a bus of 50 people. So, imagine being on a press trip where every single tour you're on, you have 50 or 20 people on your tour.

In those kind of situations, it's not always as hard as some of these other things we've talked about to be going off on your own and doing your own things. But some things that I want to point out in here is you'll notice that some of this is a conference and it has the conference schedule on here as well. So, there's a bunch of business appointments here in the middle and then as we get to the end, now we're back at transportation to the airport, meet in the princess lobby, things like this. So, this is an itinerary where it's a mix of different things and this isn't uncommon.

I've been on press trips where we were supposed to go to the destination and tour the destination and then put together our thoughts on the destination and discuss them, either in a discussion session or in a press briefing style thing or in a proper conference with the people there. So, it's important to be really specific looking at your itinerary to make sure that there aren't some other business meeting type things that you need to be doing on your itinerary.

Let's pop over now to this other PDF that I have up. There we go, the Alabama one. And we're going to switch so that we're just seeing that. So, this Alabama trip is the one that we were just talking about where the weather just totally went to crap and they had to re-plan the whole thing, but this I believe, and Sky can chime in on this, this I believe is her original itinerary. So, in this itinerary, they arrive at the hotel and they have a little bit of information about each venue in here and that's really great because it's helping you to start to know of what to dig in on and hopefully, what kind of stuff they're going to be doing with you when you're there.

They say it's a historic building. So, what I would immediately do upon seeing this is I would write them and I would say "Hey, I noticed that the hotel we're staying at is a historic building. I don't see on here that we specifically have a tour of the hotel. Is it possible to do a historic tour of the venue? Is there anybody that offers that? Is that something that can be



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added or I can just do on my own?" So, this is the kind of thing where when you see something like this, you can start to maximize, even if it's not on the itinerary. And there might be and they might come back and say "Yeah, I need a clock. We're going to have a little tour of the hotel before we go out to dinner" and then I would be like "Okay, well is it going to be more of a tour of the property because I don't really write hotel reviews, but if it's historic, then that's something that I can use. So, is it possible to have somebody include that on the tour that we're going to be having?"

And like I said, the more of these things that you can be negotiating and discussing in advance with the PR people, the more likely it is that that will actually happen. And again, the onus is on you to be checking in with them and say "Hey, by the way, we are going to be talking about the history of the hotel on this tour, right?" But do be doing it with them in a sidebar or over email so that you're not that person who's constantly asking for other stuff and stats to annoy the other people on your trip.

You'll see the next day that it starts at 1:00 p.m. and then they've got a lunch. They visit a garden for two hours. They go back to the hotel and theoretically have time to rest and then, they go out to dinner. So, this is the kind of day where it seems like a relatively chill itinerary and you have the whole morning empty. And I would immediately ask myself "Okay, what am I going to do that morning?" We could all work, we could all sleep, but here in Mobile, what am I going to do with this time?" And so, you can go back to the things that you've researched about that destination and then say "Hey PR person, I noticed that there is this Antebellum home where they have historic re-enactors who tell you the life story of this woman who lived here and this and that, and it's not on our itinerary. I was thinking about going that morning. Is this something that you can help me plan?"

You can just go on your own and do things, but by looping in the PR person, you're much more likely to get tours lined up and get private tours and things like that when you have these blank spaces like this in your itinerary. And Sky's telling me that the gardens got rained out, but this is the kind of thing where when there's a garden like this on here, it might not be something that you know about. You might not write about gardens typically, but there's a lot of magazines that look for things like this. That look for tours of gardens, historic gardens, garden events, different things like that.

Even if you've come on this tour. This is the tour, like I said, that was supposed to be a bit more outdoorsy. Unfortunately, that changed because the itinerary changed, they still have the golf shores thing in there, but they do have this one main mobile that's history. So, that might not be your beat, it might not be something that you typically write about, but seeing that this is on the itinerary can trigger you to go look up some places or to hit your pocket cheat sheet and see "Where can I place this?" If we're going to spend two hours at this thing, what am I going to do with this? And if you only get the full itinerary the day before the trip, that can be really difficult and I apologize for that on behalf of all the PR people who won't apologize to you for that. But the beauty of the intern, you can be at the venue and be



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Googling these things while you're at the venue or while you're over lunch before you get there or something like that.

And that's one of the reasons, actually, that I like doing sidebar conversations on tours. But during meals, I actually tend to be trying to do as much planning for the upcoming itinerary as I can. So, resist the often very tempting urge, especially if you have a crazy itinerary, during meals to just -- chill out isn't the world, but to just kind of shoot the breeze with your other attendees. If that's the only time that you are not on a tour, use that lunch hour to be planning what you're going to be looking at, at the next venues that you're going to.

I don't want to keep you guys too long. We have one more itinerary, I'm just going to peak at some important things to note on there. And this is the Word document from Darcy, so let me see if I can get this open for you guys. This is going to be the itinerary for the Minnesota State Fair, so let's pop over to that for a second. All right, so you should be seeing the Minnesota State Fair itinerary.

This one I wanted to make sure that we looked at this because this is a blogger trip. So, this is a bit different and I believe that she had written me or somebody else wrote me to say that they had gone on a trip which included some Instagramers and some influencers and that's really not their thing and it really changed the tone of the tour and the way that it was to be on that tour and be doing the research. So, I wanted to make sure that we also looked quickly at a blogging specific trip because those things can be very different and the other people on the trip with you can cause different issues in terms of you getting the information that you want.

Sometimes when you're on a trip with people who are more present-time social, as in Instagramming versus writing on their blog later, but as well as with bloggers, there's obviously going to be a much bigger emphasis on photos. And sometimes that can really, really drag down the whole timing of what you guys are doing on the trip because the PR person might have the concept of how long it takes to visit a certain venue, but they didn't factor in that every place you stop and places that you don't stop, there will be an additional three minutes of people taking photos.

Like I said, I just want to look at this quickly. So this is a great itinerary in that they have a lot very different things. So, this is a great itinerary from the enticing people in the PR perspective, but it might not necessarily be a great itinerary for each person. For instance, they go from a non-profit where you're going to have a cooking class and then they've got a mini golf place. Super, super different things and not necessarily stuff that's going to be interesting to every Instagram influencer or every blogger.

This is the kind of itinerary where they've got breakfast starting at 7:00, 8:00 they're on the bus. They don't get home that day. They arrive for a nightcap -- I hate when they say nightcap and dinner at 5:15 on press trip itineraries by the way because what they really mean is that dinner's going to end up being at 7:00 and then, the nightcap you'll get home at midnight. So,



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never believe them when they say this, but this is an itinerary where they are leaving at 8:00 and they are not back until probably significantly after 8:00. The next day, there's just this very amorphous, all day, all night at the State Fair. That's it. It says all day, all night. What do you even do with that?

This is the kind of thing where I would want to make sure to super drill out with the PR person and say "What time is the bus or the shuttle taking us to and from things that day? Are we going to be walking around the State Fair with some sort of guide? Are there particular contests at the fair that day that we want to be looking at? Will we be expected to stay together?" because herding a crowd of Instagramers at the State Fair, I can't even imagine how difficult it would be as a unit to move around that enterprise.

This is the kind of thing that by clarifying with the PR person and then when you're on the ground, being again, protective of what you're doing. Like "Okay, great. I'm so glad we're all here. These are some things I'm interested in doing. Is it okay if I go off and do those on my own?" or like "Could we stop by this booth? I would really love to see this thing." This is the kind of situation where you need to be extra, extra protective of your focus and your interests on the trip.

Like I said, this itinerary includes a lot of very different venues, but it's similar to the person who had the bad experience with the PR person who had her first trip right when her father had passed away. But these are very major venues. There's the zoo, there's mini gold arcade, there's the sculpture garden, and then there's the science museum. These are not necessarily of interest to people who have come to go to the Minnesota State Fair and who are interested in local good and doing a cooking class.

This is the kind of thing where you could maybe try to opt out of some of these, especially if you do it right when you get the itinerary, but otherwise, you want to take this and make the best of it. So, if you're at the zoo, do sidebar conversations with the tour guide as you're walking around. Cuddle up to that guy and as he's walking around, even if you were completely uninterested in anything he's saying, ask him more questions. Say like "You know, I write about food and I haven't actually been on a tour of a zoo before, but I was wondering can you tell me more about how you guys interact, not just behind the scenes with the animals, but how do you choose which animals are going to be here?" And take it to the next step. Be like "How was your acquisition program? Are there animals that you're looking at adding or rescuing? Are there any new things coming in that way?"

Take the topic of this tour, go past it. Go into what are some things that might be coming up that he hasn't mentioned because he's just giving you the typical behind the scenes tour. Go in more things about how the venue makes decisions and why they do things. What is special about this particular zoo? The mini golf honestly, I was going to say I can't help you, but this can be a good opportunity to look and see if this is a trend. Is it a trend to have artists design mini golf? It actually is, I've been to some museums where they've incorporated mini golf



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into the museums and they have local artists who come and create mini golf courses. Each hole is designed by a different artists that are meant to echo famous pieces of art.

Even in something like Can-Can Wonderland. You can start to look for trends. Since when has mini golf and cocktails together been a thing? I think of mini golf as with families. How do they do that? How do they negotiate that? So, even if you have an itinerary like this where one whole day of it is not going to the fair which you thought you were going to do and there's venues that are very -- they've been there for a while, they're very major attractions. Start to drill in, look for trend pieces. Walk around and see "Okay. They have an arcade. They have lots of pinball." I know nothing about pinball. Are any of these machines interesting? Are they different? Do some of them look old? Is the owner really obsessed with pinball and has been collecting vintage machines for 20 years before he opened this establishment? Is this a thing?

Just start to look around and notice what is there a lot of? What seems particularly historic? What seems particularly weird? And then find somebody and ask why. And if they don't know, find somebody else and ask why. And keep going until you figure out why that venue has that thing and now you've figured out what you can write about it. So, with that, that's really my best piece of advice. If you feel like you don't see a story, keep looking around for something that there's a lot, that is very old, or that is very weird, and ask why it's there until you get an answer. And that's your interesting thing.

So, thank you guys so much for joining me and bearing with me. I'm going to go hit the Portland airport now and I'll catch you guys next week.