



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series: The Players and The Game

So let's jump in. So this week we're gonna talk about guidebooks. I've got a couple different webinars that we're gonna look at the life of a guidebook writer both in terms of the writing and the research aspect. But before we get into that you need to know what guidebooks out there are looking for writers right now.

What it's like to work with them as in how they're different rather than me just telling you this is what writing for guidebooks is like. And then you hear from somebody else, "Oh, no like it's actually da, da, da, da, da." It really depends on the company. Like I was saying the reason that I'm not gonna talk to you yet about so much about what it's like on the ground to do the work of being a guidebook writer, we're gonna get more into that next week. I will talk about it a little bit this week in terms of how it varies from one guidebook company to another because this is a really important decision in factoring in whether this type of work is even worth it for you.

I'm gonna talk about some kind of bad press the travel guidebook writing has gotten over the years and whether that's true or not and how it varies from company to company. So in order to do that we need to look at who are the companies that you can write for today because they're not the same as in 2000 when a lot of press was happening around what it's like to be a guidebook writer.

A lot of things in that space has changed but just like with magazines it's not that they've died. And there still are a lot of opportunities out there, in fact, a lot more than you would think as I had mentioned in the blog post today about today's webinar. So specifically the way that I'm gonna work through today's call is that I want to talk first and foremost about why you should be paying attention to this. Why guidebooks are something that should be on your radar especially if you don't have a ton of work on your plate right now or if you're brand new. And then like I said we're gonna look at the different companies but I'm gonna look at them through two lenses.

One is how do these companies set themselves apart for the consumer? What is their voice? What is their position in the marketplace? So some of these things you might already be familiar with, not just the companies but kind of their brand positioning. But it's important to think about that because a lot of what goes into you factoring out if it's gonna be worth your time or not to work on these guidebooks is how long it's going to take you. And if a guidebook has a voice and an audience that's very different than what you're used to writing for even if the rate seems good, the work doesn't seem too crazy. It's gonna take you a long time because you're not used to writing that voice, you're not used to using your research eyes to look for the type of things on the road that are gonna be of interest to that audience. Somebody who I've done coaching with who's pretty much exclusively a guidebook writer



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right now, that's that's all of her travel writing. She found she's working with several different companies and we'll talk later about whether you can do that and how that works.

And some of them come much easier to her than others and that's in part because some of them need a much more erudite language on the history of a place. Or some of them need much more service-oriented information like how to versus this deep background. And so like I said we're gonna talk more next week about that actual work and how that looks like. And I've got all sorts of information for you about you know, the daily life of the travel writer who is working on guidebooks and on the writing side as well as the research side.

And so then I'm gonna talk about how that different voice plays out in terms of the company culture. And sometimes as you've no doubt seen you know, in the press with things like Uber and things like that the companies that seem you know, the most exciting to consumers or that have a cool brand can sometimes be the ones that aren't the best to work for.

And so we'll talk a lot because I want you to know both so you can make these decisions and also so you can understand the marketplace. We're gonna talk a lot about how these companies have shifted hands over time and how they have kept their business going through the downturn of guidebooks and now its renaissance. Because that helps you know if you are putting all of your eggs in one or maybe several baskets that are a little more likely to break out from under you than others. And then we're gonna talk about what you need to break in. So as I go through talking about each company individually I'm gonna tell you specifically for the companies that we're gonna look at what the process is for working with each of them, for getting into work with them for the first time, for applying. Okay, so I think that somebody had mentioned earlier on should we approach the editors with an LOI? And it's actually it's quite a bit more complicated than that so I've talked in the past about letters of introduction and that's something that's pretty quick and easy and you just kind of get out of the way.

In a way when you apply to write for a guidebook you will be sending a cover letter, you'll also be sending your resume, you'll be sending clips. So it can feel like a letter of introduction in some ways but it's important to remember you're applying to write a whole book. So this is very different than when you're applying to write you know, a blog post once a month or once a week or even four times a week for a place. This is a big commitment for the company that they are putting into you and this is something that's really useful to think about and I tell people this when they're looking at doing books more generally. So when you are working with a traditional publisher to do a book what happens is, your pay is something right, and we all think about what our pay is. But their output of money on that book goes way, way beyond your pay.



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They're paying for that editor that's working with you, they're paying for the proofreaders. They're paying for the marketing team. They're paying for the designer that does the cover. They're paying for the salesperson that's working with the bookstores to make sure that your book gets placed. They're paying for the strategist who figures out when in the cycle of book releases throughout the year your book should be released to get the best traction. They're paying for the photographers that are going out and getting those photos. They're paying for the fact checkers. So there's a ton of money that's being put in to support the work that you are doing. And because that's such a big investment on behalf of the company you're gonna get a lot more vetting doing a guidebook than you would with other types of writing. However, the really cool upside about that is that while you may be getting more vetting a lot fewer people are willing to jump through all those hoops.

And I'll give you a really clear example of what this process looks like when we get to talking about the individual publishers. But a lot fewer people are willing to go through that multi-stage application process. So what happens is, you might find that you're actually the only one that actually goes through and does all the steps. So even if you're new to writing at all, to writing for guidebooks, to writing about travel, having the grit to go through that process just like I say with you know, pitching and repitching and following up with editors. Having that grit is one of the most important things to actually landing these gigs.

So usually when we talk about what we're gonna talk about in the webinar I tell you my experience on this particular topic. But this is the first webinar where I have to tell you a great big disclaimer which is that I have never written a guidebook for a mainstream publisher which is what we're talking about this week and the next couple weeks. So I want you to know, that even though I have never done that personally I am not just basing what I am telling you on things I have read online you know, on various random vague blog posts and things like that.

I know personally and have for years people who write a lot of guidebooks. Some of the people who have, in fact, written these posts about what it's like to be a guidebook writer, people who've written 12 guidebooks or 7 guidebooks or written 3 guidebooks at a time. I've coached some of them. I'm very close with a number of them and I know a lot about what this is like through them. And in part, the reason that I never got into writing for guidebooks myself is, I always had \$100 to \$200 an hour hourly rate as a travel writer.

And it never seemed to me like writing a guidebook was an opportunity that would jive with that imperative in my writing business. But I've got to tell you that I spent a lot of time looking into this recently because I thought that it might be time for me to get into writing guidebooks as well. So I'm bringing you a lot of information which is not firsthand but it's not hearsay. It's something that I've heard directly from people who work for a lot of these companies including Pauline Frommer, herself. So I'm bringing you the best information that



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you can get, in fact, because I'm not just drawing on my experience writing for one company, I'm gonna bring you multiple sides of the story.

So, before we get into writing or, sorry, to talking about the different guidebooks companies specifically I'm gonna talk to you a little bit about why you should take a deeper look at guidebooks. And I talked a little bit about this in the blog post today. So as I'm talking I'd love for you guys in the chat box to let me know what attracts you to guidebooks? Whether that's what made you sign up for this webinar today, it might have just been curiosity. Or what is it about guidebooks that has a certain stirring for you in terms of something that you would like to do with your travel writing or time? So let me know about that in the chat box.

And then as you're telling me that I wanted to let you know that there's been a lot of...and when I say bad press I literally mean there was an article in "The New York Times" essentially talking about how terrible it is to be a guidebook writer. So there's been a lot of bad press very literally about the life of the guidebook writer as opposed to the life of the general travel writer but the guidebook writer specifically.

And in some ways that is a truthful misconception. I put that phrase on here and I was trying to think about a different way to say it but that's really the best thing that I could come up with. Because when people talk about what it's like to be a guidebook writer they're typically talking about that moment when they just hate their job. When they absolutely wish that they weren't there and that they were somewhere else. And I can tell you I've had like seven of those this last week because I've been caught on planes that have been stuck overnight here and flights that were missed because of that and just you know, basically in the hell that is travel.

And this happens to all of us to do this job and even those of us who don't do this job and just travel recreationally. And I can tell you that a lot of the things that people say about being a guidebook writer like going to seven different hotels and eight different restaurants and three different museums and four different nightclubs every day is pretty normal for being a travel writer period. When we do our freelance travel writing boot camp week-long event I tell people that I'm not gonna give them a whole afternoon of like three or four hours at one location. Even though they have an assignment to do interviews and to pick up ideas and different things. And I say that I'm not gonna do that because even though we're here and we're learning it's not realistic for you to pattern having a lot of time to ask questions until you get to the point. Or having a lot of time to wander around somewhere until you finally find something because that's not what being a travel writer is like.



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Being a travel writer as a profession means that you prep before you go somewhere and when you're there you make the absolute most of your time. Which means you don't do things that you can also look at his home. You're getting the things that you have to get in person on the ground that you can only get with your own two eyes. And so a lot of the stuff that has been the negative press around being a guidebook writer I find kind of a red herring. Because it's really kind of about the whole profession of travel writing as a full-time occupation. Sorry, there's a quite loud ambulance in the background. I'm not sure if you guys can hear with my new microphone or not though but sorry about that so.

That being said it means that if you are gonna be a full-time blogger or if you are gonna pull your whole income writing for magazines, you're gonna have a similar set of circumstances to the negative things that people say about being a guidebook writer. So you can just decide those hours aren't for me. I don't want to do that, that's not the way I like to travel. And that means that travel writing is something that you shouldn't do as your primary source of income and that's totally fine. And that's great to know before you spend a bunch of time trying to learn how to make it work. But if you have signed up for that life the thing about guidebook writing is that depending on the company and like I said we're gonna get more into this in a bit. But depending on the company guidebook writing gives you the type of security that you simply cannot get with any other type of travel writing whatsoever even if you write regularly for a magazine. I just don't know somewhere else where you're gonna get a contract which averages around \$35,000 just handed to you for about four to maybe six months of work.

I just don't know anywhere else in this industry where you're gonna get that. You might get contracts that have a monthly retainer that add up to that over time but those can be broken you know, month to month and things like that. So this is really a place for people who want security from their travel writing and it's not just the security of the year that you're working on your book. But often there is either an expectation implicit or explicit that you will also be writing the updates of that book.

So we'll get more into updates and these different contract terms around writing for guidebooks in a little bit but the main thing I want you to know is that there's money here and that money is a lot more secure than a lot of other different types of writing that you could be doing. And so something a lot of folks have said in the chat box about why they're interested in writing for guidebooks is another really great reason to get into this in the first place and that is the status of having a published book.

Now, you know, there's a lot of people that I talk to especially I just came from the Women in Travel Summit about a week or so. And a lot of folks there were telling me you know, that they have their own blog and they're gonna publish this book and then they're gonna publish that book. And I spent a lot of time with book publishing people and I was kind of you know,



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thinking to myself like what's the marketability of these books, like how many people on their e-mail lists are actually going to buy this? Like what is the time that they're spending on this book actually gonna do for them?

And so as Sheryl said, there's the status of having a published book and then there's the status of having a book that's associated with a really strong brand. And that's something that's just huge you know, even if you have a book that comes out through a major publisher. There's somebody that I know in Boston, that I saw at a conference recently and he's got a really cool book called "The Map Thief" and he's a very research-oriented journalist.

But the thing is like his book is cool but you hear the book and I could tell you what it's about and that's still not as powerful as me saying that this guy wrote a Lonely Planet guidebook. And I think it's really interesting like I said we'll talk about the difference between how the guidebook companies are perceived for consumers versus how they treat their travel writers. But something really interesting that came up when I was looking things up for this call and setting up the slides and everything was that when I was looking through stock photos and I googled guidebook on the stock photo site that I use.

Every picture of people traveling with guidebooks, they were all Lonely Planet guidebooks and as is the case with you know, big newsstand magazines or Uber or anything like that, remember the bigger something is the more desperate people are for it, the more interest there is around it, the more cache, the worse it typically is to work there. So we'll talk more about how that is for Lonely Planet.

And so somebody said that they're creating a travel guidebook on a travel destination that she's been to. And she's completed the interviews and online research and she's considering whether to self-publish it. And you know, and this is a great thing to think about now. I know a lot of people who just go this route of self-publishing and they kind of try to design on their own blog a series of guides around different things.

And I gotta tell you like even Nomadic Matt, who sells these travel guides I think they're like you know \$50 a day or \$20 a day in different cities around the world. He's like the second biggest blogger in the world like if you look in terms of ratings. He's right after Gary Arndt from Everything, Everywhere most of the time. And it took him a long time, I'm not even sure if I could tell you that he has a good income coming from his travel guides right now. So it's doing it yourself is never gonna be as lucrative and it's going to take way more time than doing it with a company.



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And so if you're in a position where you already have the expertise and you already have the research it's a great idea to at least consider bringing what you've already done to another company. Because something interesting that we will look out later is that a lot of guidebook companies, or not a lot, but the ones that commission full books from writers are also open to receiving a book proposal for a book that they aren't currently publishing. Like an idea that you had. So if you wanna do like a foodie road trip of the Basque region of Spain, if you wanna do a whole guidebook just around that, you should pitch that as a book proposal before you just publish it yourself because somebody might just buy that. And like I said then they'll bring that team with the editor and the proofreader and the salespeople and the people who already have a relationship with the bookstores and all that, they'll bring that for you. So let me just look at a couple of the other reasons that people said they wanted to get into guidebook writing. Yeahs, so Aleisha said it's a longer-term gig and like I said that's a really great reason to get into it.

But one of the nice things that nobody's mentioned... I see a lot of traveling deep immersing in culture and Lisa, I know has a background in history. She's got a master's in history so this is a great thing for somebody like her and Artemis says she loves hiking guides and seeing how different writers approach the perfect trail.

That's another one and I'm gonna talk more about the growth of these guides that aren't just travel guides but that are thematic travel guides like road trips and romance and hiking and things like that. But something that nobody said which is one of my favorite other reasons to use guidebook writing as the cornerstone of your travel writing income portfolio, your client portfolio is the following. Which is that when you are out researching a guidebook just like when I'm out researching any destination. I might be there for a specific purpose. I might be there for a specific story for a specific magazine. I might have some ideas that I want to pitch when I get home but you are picking up at least 20 or 50 times as many ideas as the ones that you're actually gonna use for that source.

So when you're out researching a guidebook and you're exploring the nightlife somewhere you might find that there's actually a really cool kind of institution in the city that you're in, that places that are normal coffee cafes during the day turn into these nightclub type venues at night. And that's something that you can then pitch to a magazine and it wouldn't necessarily make its way into your guidebook past like a sentence. And it's not a conflict for you to find that in your research as a guidebook writer and then turn it into an article for something else. Whereas, if you're writing, for instance, for a tourism board's website or for a visitors' bureau kind of the book that they put out every year and you find that it is a conflict a turnaround and pitch that to a magazine because you're getting paid by the tourism board or you're getting paid by the tour company or by the hotel or something like that. So one of the nice things about working with guidebooks is that they give you a paid way and



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not just paid for your time but also paid for your travel expenses which is really rare these days.

They give you a paid way to uncover story ideas that you can then sell somewhere else. So you're probably not gonna have the time necessarily unless you're super organized to pitch those while you're on the road doing your research or getting your book done. But you can have a huge set of ideas that then coincidentally when your book is coming out and you can then say, "I've got a book coming out with you know, Rough Guides this month. Would you like an article on this, this, this, and this?" It's this wonderful circular thing where you're writing articles other places about your book and it can help fuel book sales for your book which can, in turn, led to royalties. Which is something that we'll talk about later which is money that you get above and beyond your advance which is that first huge chunk of change that you're gonna get from your guidebook company. So those are all the really great reasons that I wanna remind you that this is something to definitely consider if you haven't thought about it yet as being something serious for you.

And like I said I'm gonna go through all the different companies and show you where the opportunities are. And that will kind of help paint a firmer picture for you about whether this is something that you can actually do. But the most important thing that I wanna say is that it's not harder to do guidebooks than it is to do any other type of professional full-time travel writing. And, in fact, what's really cool about it is that if you are new, if you are new to this life, to this lifestyle, to getting all of these things done then this can help you learn how to do that.

It can help you learn how to manage your time as a travel writer and how to hit deadlines. And this is really crucial because I have a lot of people that I see at events or that I work with one on one and there's this cyclical thing that happens which is that you have a bunch of free time or you know, time that you've decided to dedicate to your marketing work. You spend a bunch of time marketing. And then you get work which is great, right, that's the goal and then you stop marketing and then that work finishes and then you don't have work again.

And you've lost that energy around pitching and it doesn't happen. And so what happens is that you're constantly on this yo-yo diet of how you're spending your time of writing and researching versus pitching versus all these things. And it doesn't help you to set up a routine of having a full day of travel writing work. Which you can then port over and continue to do after those first three-four whatever articles that you've got are done. When you're working on a guidebook it's gonna be several months of work where every day you know, you get up and you're organizing your notes and you're figuring out we're gonna go to that day.



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You're maybe transcribing some interviews or you're writing up what you did the day before as you're on the bus going some. It creates the routine of a full-time traveler writing life over a period of time that's long enough to really set that in for you. So that once that guidebook job finishes you might take a little bit of a break but you're now primed, you're used to writing that many thousands of words per day and you're ready to keep going.

So this is one of the reasons why I really think it's a cool thing to do when you're new because it helps launch you into that lifestyle. Now, like I said someone asked earlier on the call how do you break into it, is it just a letter of introduction? And the answer like so many things in travel is it depends and it depends on the company. And like I said that's because of some of them work different ways but the other thing is that you have to remember why there are so many different guidebook companies in the first place.

Why is it that we have the "Rough Guide to Italy," the "Eyewitness Guide to Italy," the "Frommer's Guide to Italy" the Fodor's? Why do we have all of these different guides to Italy? Why do we need so many? Well, it's the same reason why there's 10,000, 100,000, probably 300,000 different travel blogs about Italy right, is that everybody covers it slightly differently. And in the case of guidebooks, it's not so much that they need to be slightly different but it's that they need to have a very specific take. A very specific lens that they use to discuss everything which is really firmly rooted in their audience.

Now, this is something that if you've attended any of my live workshops or if you've done the Pitchapalooza or the IdeaFest program, you've heard me go on and on and on about for magazines as well that magazines have to be incredibly rooted in their audience and so do your ideas if you want to pitch them. But the thing about writing for guidebooks is that just because you live somewhere or just because you've been somewhere a lot, if you are not the type of traveler that that guidebook company is targeting you might not know that city in the right way to write that guidebook. And so this is something else important to keep in mind when you are applying is that you don't necessarily have to be the type of traveler that that book is rooted around. But it can really help you with your clips, it can really help you with how you frame your application to show that you can find the types of things that are interesting to the types of people that that guidebook is around.

So what are the different books and what do they sort of sort out into? We're gonna break out...like I said we're gonna break out these companies into a lot of information about each one a little bit. But this is kind of the basic breakdown for some of the basic companies. So you could say that the students and backpackers of the world would stick to Let's Go and Lonely Planet, particularly they're ones about how to travel on a budget.



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And then what about the adult budget travelers? I would say are still gonna have Lonely Planet for sure, you're also gonna have Rough Guides, you're gonna have some of the Time Out guides, and you might also have Pauline Frommer's guides. Now, what about the upper end of the spectrum? So Rick Steves, especially for Europe, also Frommer's, I would say maybe a little bit of Eyewitness, in here for upper middle class and some of the other ones, Cadogan and Footprint, you might not know as well and Moon Handbooks. If you're not familiar with them already I'm gonna spend a lot of time talking about them today.

Moon Handbooks are really, really lovely and I would say they're kind of, you could think of them as almost newer on the market in terms of name brand. But correspondingly that means that they've got fewer people applying and they're much better to work with and we're gonna talk all about that in a bit. And then on the higher end is Fodor's, and Eyewitness. And I would say we're gonna talk about Frommer's and Fodor's and they're kind of interesting weird situations. And I would keep this in mind that Frommer's is a bit more middle class and Fodor's is a bit more upper class and Eyewitness is up there as well. Now, something that you'll see when I start talking about who you can write for is that these guidebooks that are for the upscale travelers are very hard/next to impossible to write for. Now, why is that? This is a weird reason in that they both are not doing so awesome financially. So Eyewitness got bought by and merged with another guidebook company a few years ago so they're essentially not updating those books.

So in the case of Eyewitness, these are really fantastic books. They really are one of my favorite guidebook companies to use for when I'm going somewhere and I don't have a guide for work, when I'm going somewhere and I'm kind of trying to find things myself in an art and historical sense. So they've got these amazing drawings of cathedrals and museums and they show you where to find different pieces of art and they tell you the history and it's all broken out. So a lot of that doesn't need to be updated every year so they don't really need a lot of writers to work on them. They really have only at the back of the book a bit of very squeezed together information about restaurants and hotels in different places. So if you think about it it's very easy to update that so they don't really need a lot of outside people to do that. That's something that they can largely do in-house.

And in the case of Fodor's we'll look at this a little bit later but Fodor's books also tend to be very heavily stylized in terms of the brand voice and also the layout. So it's less advantageous for them to work with outside people who they have to train on that voice and train on that physical layout, format and style than it might be for some of these other companies, okay?

So, another thing to consider and I'll tell you more about who does this and who doesn't is that some companies will have you personally write the entire book. Like Sharon was referring to over here in the chat box. Whereas, other guidebook companies work with



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something that is called a pool of writers that they pull from. Now, are there advantages to both? Yes, are you gonna get \$35,000 from being one of the writers in a pool? You could if you get a whole book. So there's cases where even if it's a company that works with a pool of writers and that would primarily be Lonely Planet and Rough Guides on here, okay, a little bit Fodor's and a little bit Frommer's as well but primarily Lonely Planet and Rough Guides.

If you are going to be working with a company that works with a pool of writers you could get a whole book, you could get a chapter in a book, you can get a lot of different options for them. So when we were talking before about guidebooks and kind of all the things that go into it like being a long-term gig kind of having the status of a published book and all those things. It's different when you're one of 17 writers who's working on a book right, then you don't have that same cache of having been the person who wrote the book. So this is something else to consider is that there's types of opportunities with guidebook companies which are a bit more like working with a magazine. Where you might have a little bit of work for a little bit of time or rather a lot of work for a little bit of time. And you'll get a decent paycheck out of it and you'll still technically get that author credit but it's not the same as when we think of writing a whole guidebook.

So, I've listed here the players that you wanna know as a writer today and you'll notice that first and foremost I xed out two of them or rather I struck through two of them. So one is Eyewitness and I already talked about why that is that they are essentially not commissioning any new writing. The second is Let's Go. Now, I wonder, let me know in the chat box if any of you guys already know why I've xed out Let's Go here. And some of you might not even be familiar with the Let's Go guidebooks. That wouldn't surprise me because they're ones that I remember seeing back in the day.

When you know, before the Internet sort of to say but not exactly before the internet but before there was so much travel information online. Any time I was going on a trip somewhere I would go to the bookstore and I would just spend like, several nights after work hanging out in the travel aisle looking at the different guidebooks for the destination I was going to. Trying to decide which guidebook was gonna be the right one for the type of trip that I was taking.

And even though they had Let's Go books and even though this was when I was like relatively fresh out of school and didn't have a ton of money, I never was super attracted to the Let's Go books. And I was living in Boston at the time and I remember looking up when I was first kind of thinking I might leave my job to be a travel writer. Looking up how do you work with them? And I found out that they essentially it's like they only employ I might be blanking on the university but I think they only employ Harvard students or something like this. They basically only employ students and only employ students from a certain university or certain set of universities. And so I think that they technically pay but not very much and



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they're essentially set up almost as like a paid summer internship. That's how these books are produced. So that's also part of why the quality can be a little bit lacking in terms of the writing and whatnot because they're not written by people who've written multiple books. They're written by people who are maybe not even really writers in the first place, who just want to travel for the summer and get sort of paid for it.

So it's something that we as professional writers wouldn't have the opportunity to write for and we probably wouldn't want to write for them anyway okay. So that's why I've got them xed out on here so yeah, a lot of people said that they went to Europe, with them. So yeah, that's the thing is that the other...the companies on here they also tend to have certain areas where they excel. So, for instance, you know, definitely we would say Rick Steves, is great for Europe, I think everybody tries to be great for Europe.

But Lonely Planet you really know for Southeast Asia, and a lot of that is because they were originally started in Australia, by two really lovely folks. I know the female founder. It was a couple that founded it originally and two really lovely folks who just worked really hard to build what's now a great big empire that's unfortunately owned by somebody else, but they were really known for their South Asia coverage whereas, Rough Guides I would say we don't really think of them as being known for a certain area exactly.

But I tend to use Rough Guides for Europe, because I find what they cover to be better for there. With Moon has done a really good job of setting itself up in Central America, and also with a lot of the U.S., and Hawaii, and Alaska, as well. So a couple guidebook companies that I'm not gonna go into now on our deep dive besides Eyewitness and Let's Go which I xed out here are some that are more specialized and I'll explain why.

So Grant, if you don't know it it's one which is really kind of out of Europe, and if you're based in the U.S., it will be a bit harder to work with. A lot of these other ones even though they're based somewhere else and might be paying across borders they'll be accustomed to working with writers in the U.S., and making those transactions happen or in Canada, for those of you that are in Canada. So Footprint is also a smaller one and they're one where a lot more of their stuff tends to be done both in-house and done in what you might think of as a roundup fashion.

So you may or may not have seen it but there's a lot of guidebooks out there that I would term as round up guidebooks. And so what I mean by that is they're like the 10 top things to see in New York, and they outline an attraction kind of over two pages and they also tell you where to eat nearby and maybe where to stay nearby. So there's a lot like that that are kind of slim and they tend to be oriented around cities that are almost like a roundup in book fashion.



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And people like them because they're very pocket-sized and they're very specifically tailored so that they don't have to wade through all this information.

So another couple that we're gonna leave out because they're quite specific are Michelin which are done mostly in-house. And Insight is kind of similar to both Footprint and Eyewitness in terms of having a lot of stuff that's quite formulaic and also kind of regurgitating a lot of older information. And then Rick Steves is a bit like Frommer's and Fodor's that we're gonna talk about but they also tend to have things that are written more by people in-house.

But as I'm talking about Frommer's and Fodor's you can also kind of extrapolate those things over to Rick Steves. So let's dive into it and I've got one page for each of these five key ones on here Lonely Planet, Rough Guides, Moon which is by Avalon which is by Hachette and I'll explain that when we get to it, Frommer's, and Fodor's. So if you have questions about a specific company ask those while I'm on that company page before we go on to the next one, okay?

So, I mentioned as we go through you may want to ask me questions specifically about each one and these can be questions about how to work with them. Because you know, like I said this is our first webinar in the series, we've got a few other ones that I'm gonna do. And I know a lot more about working with guidebooks than I can tell you just in an hour. So if you have specific questions whether about how to apply or what it's like to work with one of them let me know. If it's something that's best saved for a future call we will do that or otherwise, I'll let you know here on this one. Now, Lonely Planet like I mentioned used to be owned by a couple who started it in Australia, and they for a long time still had their main office in Australia. Now, they have a big office in the UK, but now their main office is in Nashville. And Lonely Planet internally has become a very, very different place than what you might think of when you go to the bookstore and you see all of their beautiful you know, blue-spined books all lined up in a row.

So the way that Lonely Planet works currently and this is very much from the...directly from the editors who work there and from the mouth of the writers who work there. So this is something that you're probably not gonna see mentioned online per se and this is why I really wanna share it with you. The way that Lonely Planet works now is not at all what you think of when you think of how a guidebook is put together. So Lonely Planet works off of the pool model which I talked about which is that you apply to be a writer in their pool. They will put this on their website where you can do that. And they have a lot of different things that they'll assign out to that pool and I'll talk about those in a minute. But first I wanna talk about how it works today at this moment under the Nashville leadership to put out a guidebook from Lonely Planet.



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So they changed hands from the original owners to the BBC for a while. And the BBC just couldn't figure out what to do with them, they just couldn't figure out how to make it work. They could... They didn't have the infrastructure set up for this. They weren't used to working in print, they weren't used to working on book-length things. And so what happened was that they sold them at a pretty significant loss. You'll see it's basically they lost about half or more of the value of what they paid for it when they sold the company. So essentially for them, Lonely Planet was such a thorn in their side that it was better to get rid of it and lose money now than continue to lose money in the long term.

So what that means is that the company that picked it up picked it up with the eye to run it as an incredibly tight ship, to be incredibly efficient and to grow it back into something that makes money. Now, how is it making money today? A lot of different ways that are not just buying books. So Lonely Planet now partners with destinations to have destinations essentially sponsor or curate the content that shows up on Lonely Planet about that destination which is something that I'm sure a lot of consumers aren't cognizant of.

However, the way that information goes into the Lonely Planet system in the first place is what's really raised a lot of eyebrows with the Lonely Planet writers' pool who are a very vocal bunch. So what's happened is that once upon a time it used to be that a Lonely Planet book that was large would be written by several different writers. And one of those writers would be known as the lead writer or the editor. And they would essentially be the person who wasn't necessarily editing the book in terms of doing copy edits or editing like a book editor would edit. But they were in charge of the cohesiveness for the book, they were in charge of getting everybody's stuff together and making sure that it all worked.

And what happened recently was that they changed it that that editor is no longer a writer on the book. It's actually even weirder than that that they have people in their pool who can choose to be the lead "writer" or the editor on a book about a place that they're not writing the entries on.

And that works because today in this day and age in this moment when Lonely Planet writers are writing things they aren't setting them up in book chapters like they used to. They are updating the attraction that they're visiting or they're putting new attractions in essentially a CMS, so a WordPress like interface that connects to the Lonely Planet website. And then this lead writer or editor selects from there the things that will be included in that chapter in the book.

So this is really weird because you as the writer don't even have say about what is actually gonna appear in the book, how those things fit together or anything like that. So Joe's mentioned that he met recently a Lonely Planet editor on a press trip and they said that



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they've essentially been told to stop taking any new writers into the pool. This is something that happens kind of you know, on and off all the time that Lonely Planet has its doors kind of closed temporarily or open. So that happens every couple months so I wouldn't take that as a permanent thing that's happening.

But as I was saying the writers who are writing whatever it is, whatever they're updating it goes in this content management system and then it's selected by somebody else. It's selected in terms of how it's gonna appear on the website. It's select in terms of what's gonna go in the print book. It's selected on what is gonna appear not on the website in the section that's more like travel guides, but also what might be connected together to put together a roundup article that appears on the Lonely Planet website. So there's a lot of different ways that your writing right now today for Lonely Planet may or may not get used. So if you've heard me talk about rights in the past that means that when you're writing something for Lonely Planet you're writing something as work for hire. And you're selling all rights to it and that they're able to use it in a lot of different ways. So this means that you're kind of getting the worst end of the stick in terms of the content you create here.

Any time you do something as work for hire you need to be really careful that you don't infringe on that copyright that you've now sold when you're writing about that place in the future. And you all need to make sure if it's a place that you write about regularly that you're not infringing up on any other article's copyright that you have written in the past about this place. So this work for hire arrangement with Lonely Planet is a little bit dicey and there's no way you can get out of it because that's how their whole content management system is set up.

Now one of the things though that I mentioned earlier about being in the pool is that the pool does have some advantages because there's a lot of different things that get assigned to folks in that pool. So this means that you might be doing individual chapters in a book like we talked about. But you could also just be writing an essay pull out so if you guys could kind of bear in mind you've probably seen it you might not have really thought about it as a separate thing.

Often in guidebooks, they have these things that might be one page or a half a page which is talking about some sort of cultural phenomenon that happens in a place. Like it might be talking about a tapas crawl in Spain, or you know, the like attending the running of the bulls or it might be talking about mysticism in the Spanish mountains. You might be talking about any sort of things like this. Those essays pull outs in a Lonely Planet book are often sourced from the writer pool not necessarily by the person writing that chapter. And another thing that happens especially and specifically with Lonely Planet but you'll see it with some of the other ones I'm gonna mention is that there's a lot of online work to be done that goes directly onto their website.



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So the next one that's kind of a big company that operates in a pool like setting is Rough Guides. And Rough Guides is really interesting in that they have a kind of cool voice, like I said that they're the one I usually use for traveling to Europe but they're weird to get into and they're weird to get into because any of these companies like I said that are big, there's gonna be a certain amount of gatekeeping like Jeff said just to apply, just to kind of get in the door. But Rough Guides has some really large back doors available that you can scoot right through very easily.

And one of them is their annual writing contest so it's something that I've pulled up on the side so I can drop the link in here for you guys. It's closed at the moment but it's something where you...just something you might do with your blog, you might enter to become the person who you know, gets to stay six different weeks in six different cities with a guest or something. The Rough Guide writing contest is something that you might think like, "Well, I'm a professional writer like I don't really have time to be entering these." But what happens in this contest is basically a sure fire way to get in front of them.

Now, you get money and they let you start writing for their website right away. But it's also a way to kind of differentiate yourselves from other people in the writing pool is by going into this contest. Because they're gonna look at you more closely because they have to look at everyone in the contest. They don't necessarily have to look at everyone who has applied to write for them so that's a weird way in. But second to that I've actually got it here on the bottom of the slide is that they accept articles just for their website and they pay quite decently for those.

And that's something that you can just pitch at any moment in time, you can just pitch like you would pitch a magazine, just see what they're publishing on their website and pitch them something similar to that. And that could also be a nice way to get in front of them to get in the writing pool for the books as well as having that ongoing work of writing for their website. Because while they can be a bit like Lonely Planet in that they'll assign people in that writing pool articles for their website, the editors are more separate than in Lonely Planet.

So like I was saying with Rough Guides it's very easy to pitch them for online and that's something that they have a lot of work going on. And unlike Lonely Planet you don't need to apply through the same route that you would apply to write for a guidebook to get into that same pool that does the online stuff. Now, what kind of stuff is Rough Guide looking for and how do you start working with them? So if you wanna apply to the pool directly it's that route that I mentioned which is that you send your CV, a cover letter and some samples. Now, this is the kind of thing like I said where they get a lot of those, how often do they look at them? We don't know.



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Do they look all the time or do they look just for somebody that has a specific bit of experience? It can be a mix but you can essentially think of it in many ways like you're kind of sending your resume into a black hole. So that's something to consider which you're not gonna see with some of the other ones. One other thing that I wanted to mention though is that this is one of those places that I'm trying to remember who said it...that Sharon had said that she had a book and I said this is one to check out because they will take full book proposals for a new book which is something that they're not specifically commissioning.

So this is really great to know because not everybody does this. Lonely Planet isn't really super jazzed about doing this. Because they get a lot of random proposals or they used to do this and they got a lot of random proposals that didn't make any sense. But Rough Guides is willing to do this and this in part because they're just starting to do something that Moon has been doing really well which is to segment themselves out from doing just those main kind of general interest guides in certain places to things more like hiking and romance and road trips and all those sorts of things.

But it's important to remember also because Rough Guides is pretty big and because they have this pool model that you can get in with them. They can test you so to say doing an update on a chapter in a book that already exists and then give you more work if they like working with you.

So I keep mentioning Moon so let's talk about what this Moon thing is here. So I don't know how many of you guys have heard of this but let me know in the chat box how many of you guys are familiar with the Moon Guidebook Company. So Moon also sometimes goes by the name Avalon. It's an imprint or kind of a subdivision of Hachette which is...or Hachette which is one of the big five publishing houses here in New York.

So they however have a very, very different model in terms of how they work with writers and it's different in that they typically work on full book deals and so when I say full book deals you might partner with somebody and that would usually be your choice rather than their choice that you have applied to do it with a partner. But it typically would be that it's not one of these things where like all of Chile will be done by seven different people. One person will do all of Chile, the whole country. And they do that because they want to have the book have a consistent voice throughout. They want to have the book have a type of consistency that Lonely Planet had that lead writer for but they also have a very strong voice that they impose on all of their writers.

So Lonely Planet has used that consistency by essentially mandating that everybody do something the same way and having somebody check on that. Whereas, Moon is more



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interested in having your voice come out and this is something that we're gonna see with Frommer's as well which we're gonna look at next.

So this is nice because I mentioned how with some of these companies particularly with Rough Guide and Lonely Planet, you're gonna have to really bend yourself to their voice, to their style and that can end up taking a lot longer. Or if you're used to doing that like I have a ghostwriting background, it can not take that long. It depends again on the writer. But if you're somebody who's accustomed to writing in your own voice then Moon can be a really great fit.

And like I said they're doing a lot of these different interesting titles which are not just you know, the guide to New York City, or New York state or the northeastern U.S. But they are "New York Walks" which is just a book on I can't remember the exact number, I just looked it up for this call. But which is a book just about different walks that you can take around New York City, where it's the kind of thing you might think of as being an app. Or you might think of having somebody who is walking you through audibly but they've made it into a guidebook and it's really lovely.

And so they've been doing quite a few like this which and I'm gonna show you on the next slide some of the things that they're looking for calls for writers on so you can see more about what I mean for this. But they are especially doing a lot around national parks and hiking areas as well and they also have a number of road trip ones. I think they had one that was like road trips in the south of France, or road trips in Tuscany, and different things like this.

So, if you have an area that you're familiar with and you have that sort of predilection for outdoorsy things or road trips then Avalon Moon might be a really great place for you even if they already have somebody who's written the Tuscany book. That person might not be up for writing the next one which would be the Tuscany road trip one, right. They might not have the time or they might not you know, have the experience doing that and that's a good place for you to jump in even if they already have somebody who's done something like this.

Now, something to know about Moon is that they have a pretty strong expectation that you will do the next version of the book, that you'll do the update. But they factor that into their contract in a really interesting way which is that they'll give you a lump sum but they also expect that you'll earn more through royalties on your future books.

So what royalties mean is that when a publisher gives you a lump sum which is called an advance. That's essentially it's called an advance because it's an advance against future



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earnings. So royalties are a specific portion of the sale of each book that goes back to the writer. And this can really depend by company to company with as well as guidebook publishers but all companies. But don't think of it as being very much like a dollar or less per book, okay.

So what happens is that you get an advance, you can negotiate a little bit about what the royalty is gonna be. It's a little harder if you're new writer but if you have some really fantastic experience you can. So you get an advance and then what happens is every book that's sold counts against that advance. So the amount of royalty that you would earn goes against that in advance and at a certain amount you're said to have paid out your advance. So you've earned enough that you have covered the company's investment in paying you the advance and then you start to get paid the royalties after that.

So I have some friends that do very handsomely on their royalties from their books every year like quite surprisingly so. So this is one of the other advantages of having books is it's not just that you get paid when the book comes out. But if it's a good book and it's on a popular area and the company markets it well then you can end up having royalties as well. But just as a check in the mail that comes every year or monthly or however your particular company does it.

Now, I mentioned this earlier and something about Moon that's good to know is that they have a quite involved process for getting you attached to a book in the first place. But they do that to weed people out and a lot of people do get weeded out very quickly. And so what that means is that if you can make it through that process you will likely be the one who gets the book. So the process begins as it does with Rough Guide with a resume, cover letter and clips and then if they like you then you hop on the phone and then they have you do a serious proposal. So I wanna tell you also what goes into that "serious proposal" because like I said it's rather involved.

So, it's got 10 different sections so you start by writing an introduction which isn't necessarily the full-length introduction of a book, it's just gonna be one page. But it's an overview of the destination's personality and character and it should have a sense of place, okay. So then you have your author credentials and then you have a competitive analysis. So this is where you look at other books that are already in the market and explain why your book would be different than those.

Now, this is a really great thing to do always and I recommend anybody who tells me they're working on a self-published book do this. And it really helps you as the writer for then when you go to work on the book know what you need to do. Then you give a detailed outline of the contents of the whole book and so this should show how each region will be covered and



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how much time you plan to spend on it. And the proposed content should be similar to what they have in other books that they've already done. So you can really just kinda look at what they've done in the past and think about how you would break your destination out in that way.

And then they have you write the description and the highlights for the different regions that you would cover. So you see it's getting into a lot of work then you also have to do five sample profiles on different types of thing, one on an attraction, two on restaurants and two on hotels. And it keeps going. Then you have to do a section on how you're gonna market and promote your book. And then you have to do just a short bit on how you will physically get the work done, how long you think you'll need to do it. The number of types of photographs that would be included and where they would come from.

If you plan to take photographs you need to include the photographs that you will do as well. And then you also just find a map and use that to show them kind of what are the geographic divisions that you would plan to break the book out into. So it's a very proper book proposal but you don't do it right out of the gate.

Remember when I was talking about Rough Guides, let's go back for a second. I said that Rough Guides if you want to propose a brand new book that they don't already have you have to do a proposal right away. But with Moon, you only show your proposal after you've applied more or less and gotten on the phone and they like you. So they don't tend to ask a lot of people to do proposals. Lisa has a good question that I wanna answer about royalties which is that if you don't get enough royalties do you get to pay it back? And the answer's no and the royalties keep going as you do future versions of the book so those will kind of add up over time to go against your advance.

So I mentioned that I wanted to show you some of the things that Moon is looking for and they've got quite a few listed right now. And I mentioned that Moon has kind of made a name for itself with Central America, and also basically the Americas generally. So right now they're looking for authors for more than a dozen different books so they've got something on the Oregon Trail road trip. They've got something on New Orleans, and Maui, San Francisco, great cities here that so you might be familiar with. But then they've also got Costa Rica, and Panama, and Oaxaca, and Argentina, Andalusia, and Montenegro, and Crete, and Hong Kong, and South Africa, and, of course, Bali and Lombok. The typical kind of Lonely Planet book they're getting in on that with a new book as well.

So you can see from this list that Moon is doing well. They are adding a lot of books. They are commissioning writers to do full rewrites of a lot of books. And I'm gonna talk to you about their frequency of rewrites and updates and how that works as well at the end of the



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call. Penny, “I can’t write this fast. Do you have a slide with this list for the proposal?” I got the ingredients for the proposal from the Moon website and I will drop that link in here as well. This is just from the Moon acquisitions page.

So Frommer’s also works pretty exclusively in whole book deals for the same reason that Moon does which is that they want to have that consistency of voice. Now, there’s a while where they stopped publishing books because now they’ve really turned into a media company. They’ve got a very robust website, they’ve got a radio show. Pauline and Arthur are out there really doing a lot of stuff. They do television as well. And so they went for a little bit away from publishing new books but they’ve gone back and they have 2018 editions on a lot of things. Because they do books that need to be updated every year for some of their big destinations like New York, and Italy, and things like that.

So that means that they do often need new writers when their writers for a specific place have burnt out so to say. But they are quite strict about wanting you to write about a place that you live and if you don’t live there now you better go there every year and be there for maybe six months a year. And part of that like I said is because they tend to do these whole book deals.

But something odd about Frommer’s is that they are 100% opaque about how to work with them. There’s absolutely no contact or application listed on their website. Which is really weird because even the companies that you know, might not take a lot of people just from the cold applications have something online about how to work with them. Now, I know that Pauline does look for people for books. I spoke to her about this over the summer so I know that it’s not they’re not commissioning people. But I think they’re just a little hard to get in order to make sure that they don’t have to spend so much time going through these things.

So if you’re interested in doing a book for them I would really recommend checking out what books they have that you would be a good fit for. And sending a really strong e-mail regarding your qualifications through their normal contact form and that will bubble up with her or you could find her e-mail address online as well. Now, Fodor’s has a very sketchy application page. I wanted to show it to you guys but we’re a little bit short on time but let me pull it up in the background while I’m talking to you.

So Fodor’s like I said has a very, very sketchy application page. It looks like actually at another company that some of you guys might be familiar with. But it looks like a company that’s saying, “Here’s how to travel the world for free and earn money doing it and not work at all and just kind of be on vacation.” So it really doesn’t look like it has anything to do with Fodor’s whatsoever, there’s no Fodor’s branding on here. It says it’s IBP Publishing and it doesn’t say anything about Fodor’s on here, it just says internet brands. So I saw this and I was like, “Wow,” like I wonder if they think that this is gonna make people not apply.



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Because then they have this other page which very clearly is Fodor's and they say, "Welcome, Fodor's writers, please only fill out this application if you're currently a writer for Fodor's. If you're interested in becoming a contributor fill out this page here."

So like what Joe said about Lonely Planet, Fodor's already has a pool and they definitely have a preference for working with people who are already with their pool. Now, I have to tell you I really don't know that many people who work for them and I think a lot of it is because they tend to have a very tight-knit writers pool. For the same reason that I told you I wasn't gonna mention some companies like working with Footprints, and Insight and Eyewitness and things like that. Because they tend to do a lot of it in-house or work with the same writer that they've worked with for a long time or not introduce a lot of updates into their books. Because they're quite historic, not historic but include a lot of history.

So one thing to know is if you are interested in applying they have that application, it's very easy to fill in online. But they have a preference that you know multiple cities. They want people who can work on more than one book. Like I said they wanna have you in their pool and have you do a lot of books for them. And they also want you to have two or more years of professional writing experience already that's shown on your resume.

So how do you start? Do you pick the company that sounds like the best fit for you voice wise? Do you apply for all of them? Do you just apply for Moon because I said that one's the best? The thing to remember like I said is that you have to figure out what's going to be the best use of your time in terms of actually getting that work done whether it's the writing side or the research side. And we're gonna talk a lot more about that in the next two calls. But I want you also to remember that with some companies you're able to work on more than one book and some companies don't care if you work with other companies.

So it's not the end of the world to just apply for one and sit there and just wait and see if they get back to you, you can apply for all of them and see what works for you. You can work with one for a little bit and then you can dump and go to another one. I have to say even though I've been kind of panning Lonely Planet, I know people who've worked for them for like 15 years or maybe more. And they just do book after book after book after book for Lonely Planet.

I know people who have jobs that pay them a lot of money doing copywriting, doing... in a non-travel way and they still do these books for Lonely Planet because they're able to make it worth their time. So the really key thing here is to remember that guidebooks can be worth your time if you plan it accordingly. They can be just as lucrative as other types of writing. You just have to get in and part of that like I said is just sticking it out. And Moon is a really great place to do that because even though their application process seems really involved,



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they do that in order to make sure that the people who get to the end of it are actually gonna write great full books for them and meet their deadlines. So some terms we'll look out for. I mentioned updates are different so a book that is really big for a company might be updated every year. Like I mentioned Frommer's updates their New York, and their Italy, every year. And some books will be updated maybe every three years, maybe every four years and some of this has to do with budget constraints. So this is something that when you're working with a company is worth knowing how far in the future will they expect you to work on an update because you need to plan your life around that.

So I talked quite a bit about advances already but the thing that I wanna add there is to make sure to check whether your travel expenses are part of your advance or not. And this is very common and it creates a weird situation where you have a lump sum of money that as the editors say has been done based on the cost of living in different places. And that's meant to be both your pay and your living expenses in the destination while you're working on the guidebook. So some people say this sucks and some people say it means that you just stay in really horrible places and eat Ramen. But I think that depends again on how you're gonna spend your time and how you are going to get the work done, if you're gonna do the writing when you're there. Or if you're gonna just do the research and then do the writing when you get home and what your personal standard of living in order to get your work done is will also inform what type of hotels you stay in or if you get an apartment rather than a hotel.

So we talked a bit about royalties as well and one other thing that I just want to point out to look out for is when a company has a non-compete. If that non-compete keeps you from just writing for other guidebook companies or if it also keeps you from writing for other publications. So something like Lonely Planet which also has a magazine and a website might have a non-compete that you can negotiate around about whether you can write about that destination for competing publications or competing websites.

So that's what I've got for you today. Have a great weekend guys.