



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

We are talking about The Writing Side of Guidebook Work. Now, in, not yesterday's webinar, but in the two webinars preceding this in May, we looked at different facets of what it means to be a guidebook writer today. We looked at why anybody would wanna be a guidebook writer today. We looked at some of the things that have, kind of, been said online in blog posts and also in print as in newsprint about being a guidebook writer. And we looked at what the pay is like, we looked at what different companies you can work for, we looked at what the average day is like, how different that is or isn't from a normal travel writer on a normal family trip. And we talked a bit about how to organize your notes.

That last bit we're gonna talk more about today, but otherwise most of the things that I mentioned are things that we covered quite a bit in the previous webinars, so we're not gonna go into quite as much today. So specifically, what I wanna look at today, as we talk about the writing side of guidebook writing, is, to start with, what does it really mean? When you think of writing in a guidebook, what do you think about? And it's a question that I'll ask you guys later, so you can go ahead and throw it in the chat box now or later when I ask the question. But what are some adjectives that you think about when you think about what guidebook writing is like? Whether those are related to the quality, or the presentation, or the physical content, just some adjectives that you guys think about that. Feel free to drop those in the chat box at any time. We'll talk about those in a little bit.

And then we're gonna look at the type of, and I said, "articles" that you'll write for a guidebook. Because any book enterprise is a huge endeavor, and even if, as is the case with a guidebook, you've done so much research, you feel like you're so prepared, you feel like you're over prepared, when you sit down to write at the amount of writing that you have to do, it's not just that it's overwhelming, it's that it needs to be chunked out into achievable things. And with guidebooks, there's some very discrete types of "articles" that do very easily jump out in terms of what it is that you are producing. So we'll look at what those types of articles are and how they differ.

And then, we're gonna talk about the style that you see in guidebook writings. Now, we talked in the first webinar in the series, for those of you that joined us for the first webinar, about the different companies and how the style can definitely change from company to company, so that's definitely something to keep in mind. And we're gonna talk about the style of guidebook writing as it translates into these different types of articles, but also more generally. And then what we're gonna do is we're gonna go look at, I've pulled up full guidebooks from a couple different, actually a few different guidebook companies. So you can see these differences in style, and you can also see how these different types of "articles" that I've talked about break out in real life in the different guidebooks. Both different types of guidebooks in scale as well as different guidebooks from company to company.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

So one caveat that I've been saying throughout all three of our webinars that we've done on guidebooks is that, this is one of the really few rare things that I'm gonna talk to you guys about where I have not spent a big chunk of my career specifically studying this or doing it itself, or something like that. Now, previously, the reason was it seemed like writing for guidebooks was not the best use of one's time financially. And interestingly enough, like as I've become interested in it recently, there was one guidebook that I was like, "Oh, that looks good." Like, "I think I'll go for that guidebook, and I wasn't quite sure. And then I met someone else who wrote for that guidebook company and she had a really good contract, and then just as I went to apply for it, that guidebook wasn't available anymore, but somebody that I coached is now doing that guidebook.

So I'm really happy to say that you can definitely get these guidebook assignments. And that's why I wanted to put together this set of webinars for you. So what I've done to make sure that what we're talking about is both very up to the minute and relevant, in addition to studying the guidebooks that are on the market now, which you'll see, like I said, we're gonna go through some guidebooks specifically in Google Books in a little bit. But in addition to studying the guidebooks on the market now, I have close freelance writer friends who've written many guidebooks over the course of many years, and I've spent a lot of time chatting with them about what it's like for them both on the writing side, as well as getting the work and on this, sort of, inside track of what it's like with the companies. And I've even got information that comes from experts who run the guidebook companies like Pauline Frommer, so people on the editor side, as well.

And something that I don't have here on the slides is that, in our first webinar on the different guidebook companies, somebody had asked a question about what's going on with Lonely Planet. He had heard some news lately about Lonely Planet isn't taking on new writers for right now or something to that effect. And so, I just wanted to slightly recap that and add a little bit of extra information, because we will be looking at some Lonely Planet books today. So I just wanted to put this out there because I know that they do often tend to be the one that people think of first, and they look easy to write for. And we'll look at them later.

So the thing with Lonely Planet is that they were owned by an Australian couple who are really, really lovely. I've met the female, the wife of the previous owner, the founders, and really, really lovely people, and they sold it, and then BBC owned it for a bit, and BBC sold the whole company of Lonely Planet at a really enormous loss. Basically, they took a loss of about half the value. So sorry, I just had a really huge sneeze. So they took a loss of a half of the value of the Lonely Planet company. And it was bought by a company here in the States, and it's been based in Nashville for a bit. And then the company who's been running it out of Nashville has been doing some really interesting things, and they say that with a little bit of a



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

tone, and you'll see why. Really interesting things in terms of how they're trying to monetize Lonely Planet. And some of that involves having destinations or hotels, or things like that, kind of pay to be in control of the content that shows on the Lonely Planet site and maybe even in the Lonely Planet books.

And some other interesting blurring of the boundaries between what a consumer thinks they're getting from a guide, and ways to make money. And so, it came to my attention very, very, very recently while I was doing this guidebook series and after I had done the webinar presenting the different companies to you guys that Lonely Planet is semi-secretly up for sale again. So there will be some future changes in how Lonely Planet works that are to be determined that we don't know as of yet. So, I wanted to put that disclaimer in here as well before we get into talking about it because I am gonna show you some Lonely Planet guides going on, because those are some examples that I already had pulled up before I had this information. So, before we get going, I asked you guys to think about this before and drop some in the chat box if you already have them.

So now is the time. Tell me, you guys, what words, what adjectives come to mind when you think of the quality or style of writing in a guidebook? And like I said before, these can be related to the type of content, these can be related to the quality of the book, these can be related even to, kind of, like your expectations of a reader, or of how you're gonna use the book. So let me know some of those in the chat box. And I wanted to also bring up some of the ones that we had in the original recording of this call, and so, I'm gonna share those with you, as well. But in the meantime, you guys put the ones that come to mind for you in the chat box.

This is a great comment. I love it. And I love, Artemis, if you could share with us what you mean here by hilarious. Hilarious is actually like funny to read or if they're quality-wise. So for those of you who are listening in on a cellular phone because you've got some other work going on in the background, Artemis had said that she was skimming a Yosemite guidebook today and found the descriptions hilarious. And this is actually something that you'll notice.

I'm also curious what company this was that the amount of, let's call it, tone going on in any particular guidebook is really going to vary quite a bit based on what company the book is coming from, okay? So that's definitely worth keeping in mind. So something that we talked about in the Players In The Game webinar is that there are some companies, notably Frommer's and the Moon Guides, or Avalon as they might also be known by, where they prefer to have one person write the whole book to have a sort of tone going through to instill



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

a sense of authority and have the reader, kind of, trust that there is this person who is leading them to the destination.

And so, in the books that are more of that nature, you will often find a lot more of this voicey sort of thing. What you can also find in those books is a sense that is often missing from a lot of travel writing. And I saw really, I was on Facebook for five seconds today to look up something for work and I saw a really interesting post about this, about a child who left a field trip because of how whitewashed the history was. And something that people talk about a lot in terms of travel writing generally, is that, frequently it's only the positive that gets covered. And that's because as magazine editors very correctly and astutely say, people buy magazines to see where to travel, not where not to travel, and there's already so many things that they're curating in terms of what to put in there. Why would they write something negative about a place?

And I think that with guidebooks, people are sometimes surprised or feel a little bit permission to do something which they don't often get to do, which is that ability to get to say something negative about a place. And so that's something that you'll see in the tone of writing in guidebooks, as well. Beth has a great point here about the DK Eyewitness guides. They are so visual, and they've done a really cool thing there of, even though there's very little writing compared to other guidebooks, they're very visual books, and there's not even a lot of recommendations.

They've created this sense of authority through the quality of their visuals and the way that their book is laid out. The books have a sense of being a lot heavier, a lot weightier. For instance, Rough Guides are on this, sort of, black and white paper, which is very thin, which, kind of, gives you this sense of things being cheap even though I think a Rough Guides as being like a slightly, you could call it middle class. Maybe not upper middle class, but it's a solidly middle class sort of guidebook.

So some of the words that I sometimes hear people say about guidebook writing, and sometimes they say dry, sometimes they just say descriptive, comprehensive is another one. And sometimes people say light. And there's some interesting things that are happening that go into these different characteristics that different individuals have noticed with the guidebook writing. And that is largely this kind of fight that's going on, which is between being comprehensive and a necessary type of superficiality when you're covering truly a lot of things in a small space.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

So I'm gonna go a little bit out of order here. I'm gonna pop over to something that I've got open in my browser for us to look at for later. I wanna show you some text which is an introduction of a place. And I just wanna look at it and read it really briefly with you guys, because this particular one that I'm gonna show you really encapsulates a lot of the things that people say about guidebooks in terms of the writing that are a bit complainy. So I wanted to look at this just so we have a sense of what, you could say, "bad guidebook writing" is, but also so we can talk about why this happens.

So this is in Fodor's, which you would definitely think of as a middle class, upper middle class type of guidebook, and this is their intro. Again, we'll talk about the different article types in a little bit, but this is their intro piece for the Amalfi Coast. So I'll just read you a little bit, so you can get a sense of it. "One of the most gorgeous places on Earth, this corner of the Campania region captivates visitors today just as it has for centuries. Poets and millionaires have long journeyed here to see and sense its legendary sights: perfect, precariously perched Positano; Amalfi, a shimmering medieval city: romantic mountain-high Ravello; and ancient Paestum, with its three legendary Greek temples. Today, the coast's scenic beauty makes it a top destination, drawing visitors from all over the world who agree with UNESCO's 1997 decision to make this a World Heritage Site. This entire area is also a honeymoon haven—it is arguably the most romantic stretch of coastline on Earth."

Okay. So that part that I left you with as well as the beginning, we can say, "Wow. How much hyperbole can you put in one paragraph." Right? We've got, "One of the most gorgeous places on Earth," and then we've got, "arguably the most romantic stretch of coastline on Earth." Now if you've ever been to a beach in Southeast Asia, I don't know if you would agree with this, I personally took my honeymoon somewhere else even though I spent a lot of time in Italy, so I definitely don't agree with this.

Also, this thing about "one of the most gorgeous places on Earth," that's definitely subjective depending on what somebody's view of gorgeous is, right? There's a lot of hyperbole in here that you could think of as a bit unfounded, perhaps giving readers places to disagree, and it's because it comes from this type of marketing-esque language, right? We've got "the coast's scenic beauty," "scenic" is a totally useless word, right? "Makes it the top destination," according to who, like by what metric? "Drawing in visitors from all over the world." Okay. I mean, I guess that's slightly specific. We've got one sort of specific thing in this whole paragraph.

UNESCO in 1997 made it a World Heritage Site. The other maybe specific you can say we have is that we've got three legendary Greek temples in Paestum. I don't know what temples.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

I don't know why they're legendary, were there actual legends written about them or is this just more hyperbole? We've got a little bit of wordplay here on "perfect, precariously perched Positano" and besides that, like, you know, with Amalfi they could say what century it's from rather than "shimmering medieval."

There's just a lot of what you might think of as, kind of, overview marketing speak in here. And this is actually better than another one, which I believe is from Lonely Planet that we'll look at later as well. And Artemis very accurately calls this "fluff," or very pointedly rather is perhaps better. So this concept of fluff, or of marketing speak, or of being a bit superficial, this is also a characterization that you sometimes see given to guidebooks and not inaccurately. So as you, as the writer, are working on a guidebook, you need to both understand why this happens and what you can do to prevent it. So there are very clear reasons why you end up, especially in those intro to regions with this type of writing and that's because it's a very daunting task in one paragraph, two paragraphs, maybe three or four to put an appropriately weighted, appropriately pictorial stamp on an entire place to give somebody the ability to make a decision about whether they should go there.

And that leads us to something that bears keeping in mind, which is that guidebooks are written inherently for two different types of people. They're written for people who are there, who are going there who are literally picking up their dinner that night and people who are shopping for places to go. Either they're shopping for countries to go to for entire trip destinations, or they're shopping for places to go within one specific area. And that also creates this conflict that creates superficiality. When you're writing for two audiences that have very different needs, it can be hard to serve either of them accurately.

So one of the things that I think also happens that leads to the superficial writing sometimes goes back to what I said earlier at the top of the call, which has to do with the organizational aspect, the breaking up of the book into appropriately-sized sections, and simply physically getting it done.

Now, guidebooks don't have expansive writing timeframes. To be honest, most books that are assigned by a publisher don't, because once they decide they're paying for it, they wanna have the book out and start earning money from it as soon as possible. So what happens, though, is that a lot of people who have a guidebook assignment and this isn't their seventh guidebook or something like that, or it's really something that they do as a full-time job. A lot of people get really caught up in the travel and the research, and they know that they need to do X, Y and Z things, because they've gone over the outline for the book with their editor, so they really know what it is that they need to pick up. So they're out there, they're picking up



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

all these things, they're busting their butt to get that stuff. And then, when it comes time to write it, it's a whole another full-time job.

And I think that this often maybe not catches people by surprise because they certainly know it, so it seems weird to say that they're surprised by it. But I think people often find themselves unprepared by the sheer amount of writing that they need to do, and also the research they need to do past what they've already done. And this is one of the big separators that you'll see. Maybe not so much in those opening paragraphs that we just looked at, but in some of the ones that we're going to go into, is that you really need a level of depth especially in some of the sections that people don't consider, which we're gonna look at, but you really need a lot of depth in your guidebook that people don't bring to an online guide.

And when I say "online guide," I mean when people write blog posts that are, kind of, about a destination. I saw a pitch, for instance, today that was to a print outlet that had this structure that you guys might be familiar with, which is, kind of, you know, "Here's the place, here's the introduction, where to see, where to stay, where to go, maybe how to get there and what to eat of course," right? So this has been a really common format that came from the guidebook, but then transferred over online. But what happens is that, because guidebooks, like I said, are intended for people who are shopping on the one hand, but on the other hand for people who might be physically there right now. And they are intended to stand alone, which means that somebody shouldn't have to use their cell phone even though we know they probably will, but they shouldn't have to use their cell phone alongside a guidebook in order to navigate.

So part of writing a guidebook is also that you usually need to be doing the maps or working with somebody to do the maps. But they also need to have information in the entries that helps them navigate, and we'll see some of that later. But these might be things like, for instance, I've gone to Bali several times, and there's a lot of sort of homestay-type places that you can stay in Bali, and everything, at least there's in Ubud, in the town that I usually go to. In Bali, there's main streets and then there's just rows and rows of buildings along those streets and they seem really congested. And then you walk down the alley, and you realize that there's a big expansive space of rice paddy farms in the middle, and it's just farmland in the middle of what seems like this really busy street.

So what happens is that the way to get to a lot of these homestays is actually like to take an alley and to pass this, you know, chicken coop and to go under this clothesline, and there's the door, but you have to go up the stairs and have to knock on the red door and not the blue door and only during these hours. And then you can stay somewhere for like 50 cents a night



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

and have a beautiful lovely breakfast with a fresh fruit salad. So that type of information is something that, I'm not saying people don't include in a blog post that they might be writing about this, but they tend not to include such deep level of detail in each and every thing that they've included in a long list posted about different things.

Whereas with a guidebook, you can't expect people to click over and find more information about this place somewhere else. So it needs to be really stand alone, and that creates the need for a lot of research both on the ground, and also when you get back as well as fact-checking that research. Now, the other thing that comes up with the writing part of guidebook writing that people really don't necessarily think about, and sometimes get struck by when they sit down to write their book and start looking at some other books that are similar, and, kind of, the breadth of things that they need to include there, is how much unconscious bias they introduce into their travel. So, for instance, Pauline Frommer told me this really cool thing, which is that when she is working on books, I believe she still writes the annual update. I think it comes out every year, but it could be every two years for the New York book, because she's based here, that she does all these really sneaky things to get to see different types of hotel rooms.

Now, would you think just off the bat when you go to a hotel that you need to look at different types of hotel rooms? Probably not. I wouldn't necessarily think about that. I would, just having been on FAM tours, I know that they're typically always gonna show me like the four or five suites and different things like that because that's, I'm on a FAM, but you're not necessarily thinking about why you need to see these different room types. So Pauline has this really excellent way that she describes it. So she makes up these scenarios, and she used to be an actress so this is totally her thing, but she makes up these scenarios of different family members who might be coming to visit and she needs a room that suits this thing. So she might say like, "Oh, my aunt has a problem with her knee, so she needs an accessible room, but it needs to be a room with two beds because she needs to sleep in her own bed and her husband needs a separate bed. But then, my cousin has these three kids, and so, they really need like at least one adjoining room set, and preferably a room that has two adjoining rooms."

And she makes up all these things, and she goes to the front desk of a hotel and she doesn't say that she's Pauline Frommer, and she says like, "I live here and my family's coming, and I want to see if this hotel would make sense for them. Can you show me some different room types?" So this kind of thing she's been doing for ages. She learned this from her father, so she knows what to ask. But if you didn't, while you were there, look at restaurants that would be good for the couple who has a child that's really young, and they don't want to eat early like you might think of for families with kids, they wanna put the kid to bed and then put the



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

kid in the stroller and then go out and have dinner at 10:00. So where can they go at 10:00 as a couple looking for something slightly romantic, that's not gonna be totally white tablecloths and it will be okay for them to walk in with a sleepy baby?

So there's all of these different types of travel situations that you need to address or be prepared to offer options for in your guidebook that you might not think they are unconsciously biased from looking for when you travel. So because of that, in this day and age of writing, guidebook writing might be the most, kind of, unbiased, forced lack of bias, let's say, that you're gonna do in your travel writing portfolio. So let's get into talking more about how these guidebooks are split up, and how that plays out in the different article types and look at some guidebooks. So as a guidebook writer, you are working always on two levels. You're working on the level of your book, and you're working on the level of an individual chapter. Then within that individual chapter, there's these articles that we're gonna look at.

But what happens is that, what if you're only writing a chapter? So this is really common. This can happen. There's a lot of larger books, especially books that are multi-country books where you might be writing just the Paraguay chapter in the whole book on South America, say. Now, in that case, the book level concerns aren't your own. And so that's great because the book level stuff is the stuff that has a lot of research that you might not already be thinking about doing. So we'll get into exactly what that is. But then on the chapter level, chapters really break out on the whole, and like I said, we'll look at some actual table of contents' of some guidebooks in a few minutes. But chapter level-wise on an average destination chapter, a region chapter, things break out that you've got the intro to the region, you will have service information around how to get there, and you will then probably have further distinctions of different cities, places outside of cities, other vacation spots, things like that.

And within each of those, you will have a mix of, again, introduction, again, some service information, and then you will have site profiles, so that's like of an attraction or a historic site or something like that, lodging and food and nightlife profiles. And each of these have a slightly different way that you write them, and we're gonna look at those. But the important thing to think of on the book level is that guidebook chapters are divided into two styles. They're divided by geography, so these are the ones I just outlined for you, how those regional chapters sort of go, and intent. There's also chapters that really focus very highly on service information of a few different types. So those can be something that I call here a highlight, but another way to think of it is a top 10 list, or a top 20 list or a must-see list, or perhaps itineraries.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

These are really commonly found at the beginning of books, and some of the guidebook companies will also have itineraries in the beginning of chapter sections, as well. So you might have like the introduction to a region, and then you'll have some itineraries around that region. So we'll look at some of the itineraries and their depth, as well. I pulled them some up from Frommer's because they tend to have itineraries. but these top 10 lists are a slightly different thing. And we'll also look, I believe I have some pulled up for a Lonely Planet book. But these are very, very different than the content that you see in most of the book. What I was just saying is that these top 10 lists, that you see in the beginning of many guidebooks these days, are very different than a lot of content in the guidebook.

So we talk about how Eyewitness has these glossy pages, these lovely photos and drawings of entire churches and museums and how to navigate them. Now, that is not the norm to have glossy pages in the guidebook. Like I said, they're usually these very inexpensive, thin pages with black and white print. Perhaps now black and white and I believe Rough Guide also uses some orange for offset colors. But what these top 10 sections look like is that they tend to be, sometimes in the middle but typically in the front, almost like an insert of glossy pages among all the other pages that have beautiful photos and very little information about the places they describe, because this is like the hyperlink on the web, right?

They are essentially linking you to the page where you can go and get real information about that thing, but this part in the front is just like that blog post you would see on usatoday.com or something like that. It's got "The 12 Most Romantic Places in Italy" or something. And it's got photos and a small description of each one that says, "Go to page 371 for more information."

So these top 10 lists, like I said, if you're only writing a chapter, they wouldn't be under your purview. But these top 10 lists are very different from a lot of guidebook writing and easier writing, kind of fun to write. But they're just a very small part of the equation. So the other types of "articles" that you would see in a book setting if you're writing a whole book, that you would, perhaps, not be super-prepared for are some really heavy service topics like how to do laundry, major festivals and holidays you need to list, currency exchanges and how and where to do it, which most of us don't even think about these days because we just go to the ATM.

And then there's also gonna be these more context-oriented chapters that are deep dives on things like religion, history, music, ecology, and these all vary from book to book. It's been interesting to see how those titles change, as well. Now, another thing that you'll notice, like I said, is that there's these description sections that you'll see on the regional level, but you'll



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

also see it for cities and other sub-areas like parts of the countryside, like I'm sure Chianti, for instance, would have an introduction. We just have this one for the Amalfi Coast, which is, kind of, an outside of city area.

Now, the other type of article that's a bit different is something that you could think of as a highlight or a pullout, sometimes people call it a cutout. But there's these little essays that you'll see dot either a whole page or a half page and they tend to be in a, sort of, box. And they take a cultural topic, sometimes they'll take a festival or something like that and they explore it at length in a lot of detail in a way that's a very different voice than the rest of the text of the guidebook. And in the case of some of these guidebooks that are multi-author like Lonely Planet, those essays might be written by somebody who's not even writing anything else in the book. They might be written by a completely external writer.

Now, like I said, Lonely Planet is in a little bit of turmoil right now. So whether you can be assigned those at the moment is up for grabs and we'll see about that later. But you do see those type of things in other guidebooks, as well. And so, in guidebook companies, where there's more of a pool of writers situation, those things can be up in the pool and you can select among the various options. So the other type, site profile, lodging profile and restaurant profile, we're gonna look at a lot more detail, I'm gonna pull some of those up for you, and we're gonna talk about the structure of how those work. So I just wanna double check where I have the slide on that. Okay, great. So, we'll talk about the structure of how those work a little bit now and we're also gonna look at them as we dive into some actual words. And I'm sorry that...speaking of words, that the words are being cut off here on the bottom of the page. On my slide, they look fine. So it's like they're being cut off by WebinarJam and I apologize for that.

What does the writing on the page look like? We took a look, we took a little spin through Fodor's description of the Amalfi Coast to give you a little taste. But that was of the descriptions, right? So sometimes the descriptions of whole cities or regions or on the whole country can feel like they're devolving into clichés. And, yes, in a way, that's lazy writing, but on the other side, we can also understand. So for instance, somebody that I coach who has been working on about three different guidebooks recently, when she first sat down to work on her book link, the one that she's doing, she was really struggling with the history section and she was struggling with how she has a page and a half, this is a guidebook page and a half, not a real page and a half, in which to cover the whole political history of a country that's had a dictator and huge uprisings and all of these different things.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

And she had learned so much about it and now she was staring at the page and she just couldn't figure out and that space had to cover this ridiculously vast topic. And if you were with us yesterday, or rather for our Profile Article Nuts And Bolts webinar, then you heard me talk about how, really, the crux of being a travel writer is figuring out how to do that, how to tell and show something so vast as a person or a place in such a small space. But it's very difficult when you're talking about history, we're only talking about straight facts and straight chronology and crunching that down.

And so, with the descriptions of the whole cities or regions, a way to not be quite so lazy can be to devolve on facts rather than more marketing writing. But then you have to be very clear about how the facts that you're choosing to present or the descriptive elements you're choosing to promote, to present tie into the particular reader of the type of guidebook that you're working on, because guidebooks have conventions, and if somebody is a Lonely Planet user, or a Rough Guide user, or an Eyewitness user, then they have expectations. So you really want to consult previous versions of your book or related titles, for instance, books on other areas in the same region to see, not just what other people have done, but what the expectations that are being set for the reader in terms of how much information of various types they're getting. How much information is factual, how much information is descriptive, how much information that is service-oriented?

These are really the three masters that you are alternating between as you're writing a guidebook. Now, in the individual entries, you'll see particularly, the attraction entries are a little bit longer so this particularly plays in with the hotel, restaurant, and sort of nightlife style entries. You'll see a very repeatable formula come through, which is that they begin with a very, very vivid visual description. Now, this is because, like I said, most guidebooks don't have pictures of pretty much anything in there. So you will definitely find that guidebook writing has a lot more sensory detail and visual detail than you might see in a lot of other, particularly magazines which are highly visual, a lot of magazine type writing these days. But that is an uneraseable element of that guidebook, okay?

So, they have this descriptive sentence. And then they might have a sentence that's, let's call it, background, or it could be facts, it could be this and has five rooms and three have private on-suite bathrooms and it's not available during low season, but there's going to be a very quick shift from that vivid visual description to service information, because that's really what people come to a guidebook for. So you can think of everything in those entries as an interplay between these three masters of the service, the visual and the history. So that being said, let's pop over to where I loaded up some things for you and look through a couple different...right there on this one, look through a couple different guidebooks.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

So first and foremost, before we get into talking about specific entries, I wanna look at some guidebooks on the table of contents level. So this one is Italy, this is a whole book, and also I've got a Rough Guide for you here, and this Rough Guide is the "Rough Guide to Peru." Okay. So I've got two different complete single country books, and I want us to look at these on a table of contents level. So here in the Lonely Planet book, you see we've got what's gonna be, you know, the kind of grandiose, superficial "Welcome to Italy." But then we've got this "Italy's Top 18." And I'll click on this after we go through the rest of table of contents so that you can see what that looks like. But this is gonna be one of those top 10 style things that I was talking about was which may be really visual.

Now, here you'll see they've got a lot of this service information up front, which is of a more casual article style. They've got "Need to Know," "First Time Italy," "What's New," and then "If You Like." So "If You Like" is like if you like food, go here, here and here. If you like adventure, go here, here and here. And then they have another visual section, "Month by Month," which is gonna be the top things to do in different months. And then they have itineraries. And then they talk about food, outdoor activity scene. Now we're getting a little more service information, but they don't have that really deep service information in Lonely Planet up front. That is gonna be all the way at the back of the book.

So let me show you what that really deep service information looks like in a Lonely Planet section and we can contrast that to what it looks like for the Rough Guides. So, here you'll see, I'm scrolling through the different regional ones, and then their context-oriented section is called "Understand." They have "Understand Italy," "Italy Today," "History," "Italian Art and Architecture," "The Italian Way of Life," "Italy on Page and Screen," and "The Italian Table." So their context still is not gonna be so academic, let's call it, as it might be in other books. But then this "Survive" section, this is where you as a writer are having to do some really deep research. Okay, they've got discount cards, customs regulations, electricity, gay and lesbian travelers, opening hours, the post, how do people send things, toilets, how the toilets work, which is a very relevant topic in Italy, to be honest.

What travelers with disabilities should expect in Italy. Not very much, to be honest, and how to get around. Now, something that you'll see as we start to go through, and I'm going to do this with the Rough Guide rather than this book, but something that you'll see as we start to go through is that getting around information is a lot denser than you as the writer might be prepared for. So as the reader of guidebooks, you might remember that they talk about certain things, but you might not be prepared for the fact that you need to talk about every single airline that flies to a place and how many times a week they fly there. You need to find that, and you need to have fact-checking information available for your team, for your editor.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

So, let's just look at how the regional sections are organized in the Lonely Planet context. So here you'll see that we've got Rome and Lazio and the first thing we have here is highlights. So before they give you that description, they give you a highlight reel-type thing like they're doing in the front of the book. That's their style. And they're gonna give you neighborhoods at a glance, and then they're gonna talk about attractions. Now, what they do in Lonely Planet, which is really different as you see, they talk about all these attractions, and actually some of these things over here are different cities. So we stop at the Vatican Museums in attractions.

And then with Ostia Antica, Tivoli and Cerveteri, we get into different cities that are outside of Rome. So what they've done is within each of these attractions, they talk about the hospitality, they talk about the hotels and the food and whatnot that are near each of the attractions. So they use that as a way to split up Rome.

So I just wanna show you quickly, like I said, I wanna show you what that really visual section that they have is like. So here you'll see big picture, and this picture is actually from Shutterstock. So this picture wasn't shot specifically for this book. Big picture, little paragraph, and the paragraph is, again, "Once caput mundi (capital of the world), Rome was legendarily spawned by a wolf-suckled boy, grew to be Western Europe's first superpower, became the spiritual centerpiece of the Christian world and is now the repository of over two millennia of European art and architecture."

So, again, very broad strokes here on this Top 18. And that's really what I wanted to show you. But you'll see they do get into a little...they try to add some character here, so they're not quite as funny as the book about Yosemite that Artemis was looking at. But they're trying to get some names here, right? So they tell you it's a breathing organism studded with secret gardens, sleepy campi, which are squares, well-worn bacari, which are small bars filled with the fizz of prosecco and the sing-song lilt of the Venetians' local dialect, all right?

So, let's look over and see how a different guidebook is organized. Let's look at the Rough Guide. So, starts with a quote from Bill Bryson, and that, you know, gives you a sense of who the user of the Rough Guide is, as well. Bill Bryson's really about kind of going deep all around the country, traveling overland. So let's see how they present this. So the Rough Guide, super for usability, the first thing they tell us is not the table of contents, but how the Rough Guide works. So they have it set up in a color-coded way where, if I'm not mistaken, basically along the side of all the pages, they have a little ticker which helps you understand where you are, and they tell you the different types of articles that you're gonna find. You're gonna contexts, you're gonna find basics.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

This is that really servicey-type information that we're talking about. And then you're gonna find guides and then they show you how these colors work, and they also show you how the colors and numbers correspond to different parts of the country. Now we get into the real contents, okay? Now, they also have a color section, and their color section talks about where to go, when to go and things not to miss.

So this is very similar to how Lonely Planet's is, but it's less, I would say it's kind of less marketing language-oriented. You'll see they also use these not as pages, but as pre-pages because they really think of this as a real book. And their book starts with the basics. It starts with costs, money and banks, insurance, communications: post, phones and internet, senior travelers, opening hours and festivals, national parks and reserves. It starts with this. So this also tells you what Rough Guides thinks of as important. They think of that service information is paramount rather than "I want to show you pretty things," which you could kind of say was the onus of the other book that we looked at.

Now, how do they organize a regional area? So here they've got Lima. Okay, so they start with highlights and then they have this arrival, information and getting around, then they get into a combination, what's in the center, what's in the suburbs, eating, drinking, nightlife. Okay. And then shopping and so on and some day trips. So, I wanna show you guys, like I said, this arrival information, which is a lot denser than you might expect. So here is what the highlights look like for them. So these highlights are gonna be very, very short and they're gonna direct you to the appropriate page, and then we get into... The pages are cut off. So then we've actually sadly skipped over the how to get around information, which is sad because I know that I showed it in the original webinar, but now it's gone.

So, what we've gotten into here is this is the Rough Guides version of that city description that we talked about. Now, you'll see that this is both long because we've skipped two pages in here, and it's very historical and very detailed, which is not what we saw in that Fodor's introduction, okay? So you can see it's really densely talking about the main plazas, once attractive meeting places are now thick with pickpockets, exhaust fumes and not infrequently, riot police. So this goes back to that point I was telling you that these are not going to always be positive. They're trying to paint a picture that inspires an appropriate amount of wariness for the traveler, but to the tone of voice that is expected by the travelers who read these books. And for Rough Guide, like I said, a lot of service information is expected.

So here is an example of how they blend together that history and service information. So they're talking about the 17th century, but they're gonna show you how that ties into today. So, they talk about how the most prosperous era for Lima was the 17th Century, and they talk



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

about the population, and what percent was Spanish and what percent was “Indian” or other ethnic origin. And they say, “The center of Lima was crowded with shops and stalls selling silks and fancy furniture from as far afield as China. Even these days, it’s not hard to imagine what Lima must have been like as a substantial section of the colonial city is still preserved. Many of its streets and larger regular blocks are overhung by ornate wooden balconies in elaborate Baroque facades.”

So, here they’re giving you a lot of history, but not in such an academic way where they’re stuck in the past. They’re tying it into today. And then, I did find the arrival information so we’ll have a look here. So I just wanted to show you this, because, like I said, it’s a lot denser than you might think about. So they’ve got information like taxis, how to book them, how much they might cost, unofficial taxis, how to tell a taxi is unofficial or official. And then as you’ll see, they get into buses, again, they tell you specifically which operators, they tell you specifically which streets, exactly where to pick it up to get from the airport, but then what you might not necessarily think about if it comes...we’re missing the page. So what I wanted to tell you that you might not necessarily think about is that, you’re going to have to say the particular airlines that travel to a place and their schedule, and there are ways to do this online, you can ask at the airport, but this is the kind of level of research, of specifically note taking, that it’s good to know before you get into doing a guidebook that you’re gonna be writing those sort of things, because often they’re are a lot easier to get on the ground while you’re there and also just to get those sections quickly written up.

So let’s depart from the whole books and look a little bit more about chapters. So this is Frommer’s, and this is an introduction to Italy as a whole place. Now, this is going to feel in many ways more grandiose and superficial than the Amalfi Coast one because they’re looking at a whole country. But I wanna show you a couple different of these introductions by different companies so that you can see how they can change, so you can see what the options are. So I’ll just read you the first paragraph, from this one which is from Frommer’s and it’s about Italy. So they say, “Just hear the word ‘Italy’ and you can already see it. The noble stones of ancient Rome and the Greek temples of Sicily, the wine hills of Piedmont in Tuscany, the ruins of Pompeii and the secret canals and crumbling palaces of Venice. For centuries, visitors have come here looking for their own slice of the good life, and for the most part, they found it.”

Now, you’ll see that here, it’s also sweeping, but somehow it doesn’t feel quite as marketing languagey as the other. There’s not so much hyperbole. They do say “visitors have come looking for their own slice of the good life, and for the most part have found it,” which is a lot truer than blanket statement that “it’s arguably the most romantic stretch of coastline on Earth,” according to who, right? So, you could definitely say that here, there’s more balance.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

You'll see immediately in the next paragraph they start to throw in some details. They drop names of artists, they drop actual dates, they talk about the cultures that have been through here. So let's talk about what we could think of as the further side of the spectrum. Let's look at the introduction to Rome from Lonely Planet's viewpoint.

Now, here, this introduction to Rome similar to what we saw in the Peru Rough Guide that we looked at, is going to include a decent, but perhaps not as decent as you might think, bit of history. Okay, so this is their whole instruction to Rome. So it starts with, "A heady mix of haunting ruins, awe-inspiring art and vibrant street life, Italy's hot-blooded capital is one of the world's most romantic and inspiring cities." Now, I wouldn't say that any of that's inaccurate, and if you just have one sentence, that certainly gives a take on Rome.

But let's see what they do with this other part. They're touching on history, art, the lifestyle and food. So here's what they have to say about history. "The result of 3,000 years," a random big number, "of ad hoc urban development, Rome cityscape is an exhilarating spectacle. Ancient icons such as the Colosseum, Roman Forum and Pantheon recall the city's golden age as caput mundi (capital of the world), while it's many monumental basilicas testify to its historic role as the seat of the Catholic Church. Lording it over the skyline, St. Peter's Basilica is the Vatican's epic showpiece church, a towering masterpiece of Renaissance architecture. Elsewhere, ornate piazzas and showy fountains add a baroque flourish to the city's captivating streets."

Now, I would not say that this gives me a huge sense of the history of Rome. It, kind of, gives me a sense of what you'll see in Rome and maybe vaguely where it's from, but I would not say that this gives me a huge sense of the history, and likewise for the artistic riches. So these three that I kind of arranged for you, Frommer's, Fodor's and Lonely Planet, you could say are kind of a spectrum of how much detail is actually present in these introductions. So, I promised I would show you a little bit of an itinerary as well as these tend to play into most guidebooks. And it's important also here to know, because it translates to your research, what is gonna be expected in that itinerary, even.

So this itinerary basically bases itself upon the one-week itinerary and then stretches it out to two weeks. So, let's just look at one day here. So for Naples, they say, "Leave Rome as early as you can so that you can take in the major attractions of Naples, the 'capital of southern Italy.' This is an unparalleled collection of ancient artifacts," or, "There is," sorry, "at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, plus Titians and Caravaggios at the Museo e Gallerie Nazionale di Capodimonte. After dark, wander Spaccanapoli—the old center's main east-west thoroughfare—and then make a date with a pizzeria: Neapolitans stake a reasonable claim that



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

pizza was invented here. After dinner, wander the Mergellina boardwalk to enjoy the breezes and views of the Bay of Naples. Stay overnight in Naples, the first of three nights based here.”

Now, even though this is one paragraph, and even though they have included some information telling us what we’re gonna see, ancient artifacts, art, they have given us a whole, very clear day. You take the train in the morning, you do this, they haven’t necessarily told us where to eat lunch specifically, but they’ve told us where to eat dinner, they even told us where to go for a walk. So in this one paragraph with a very earnest level of detail, they’ve told us what to do in one day in Naples. So as you are out doing your research, if you have itineraries like this that you need to do, you need to be thinking of what is conceivable to do in a day, and what somebody on a tight schedule should be doing. And, like I said, there’s still service here, right? So when they talk about, I don’t know if it’s really your “best-preserved Roman remains.” But when they talk about Pompeii, they say, “Be sure to pack water and lunch, because onsite services aren’t great.”

So they include even here just in this itinerary service information, because that’s really what we’re focusing on. So let’s get into looking at, and then we’ll bring our replay webinar to a close. Let’s get into looking at these three main types of entries that I told you about, which are the attraction entry, the accommodation entry, and the restaurant entry. So, this is an interesting combination entry here, because they talk about Vatican City, which is technically a country, so they’re not just talking about the Vatican museums here, for instance, they’re also talking about St. Peter’s Square as well as how to get an audience with the pope.

So you’ll see in here, in particular, this part that I’m mousing over, “St. Peter’s Warning”... oops, come back. But they’ve got a heady amount of service in here. They’ve got one paragraph specifically dedicated to how to dress when you go there because, this is important, because they won’t let you in if you are showing too much skin, which is very accurate, okay?

So, but then you’ll notice that this entry is set up very differently to a lot of the service, for a lot of the introduction information we read before. They very specifically highlight certain things they wanna draw your attention to, and the paragraphs are long, the paragraphs are a bit dense. And when I say “dense,” let me show you a little bit of the level of detail that they’ve got here now that we’re on this attraction level entry. So they say, “The world’s smallest sovereign state, Vatican City is a truly tiny territory comprising little more than St. Peter’s and the walled headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

There are no border controls, of course, though the city-state's 800 inhabitants (essentially clergymen and Swiss Guards) have their own radio station, daily newspaper, tax-free pharmacy, petrol pumps, post service and head of state, the pope. The pope has always exercised a high degree of political independence from the rest of Italy in the form of the medieval Papal States, and this independence was formalized by the 1929 Lateran Treaty between Pope Pius..." I'm horrible with Roman numbers, "XI and the Italian government to create the Vatican.

The city is still protected by the flamboyantly uniformed (some say by Michelangelo) Swiss Guards, a tradition dating from the days when the Swiss, known as brave soldiers, were often hired out as mercenaries for former armies." So in this chunk of text, we've got a lot of specific details. The number of inhabitants, the year that the independence was formalized, but also things like all of the stuff that they have in Vatican City that you wouldn't expect, a radio station, and a daily newspaper, a pharmacy, and so on. So we start to get really dense, and also dense about things that you might think that the average person doesn't need to know, but that add flavor.

So in the example that Artemis was talking about before about the Yosemite Moon Guide, where the writer had quite a bit of humor, that goes to the tone of that book, right? Frommer's likes to be really informative, really dense, and so that's what they have here. In other types of books, this might have more observation on the part of the writer about the place rather than straight history. So, this one, I just wanna show you. I'm not gonna read it. This is a shorter one, but this really is about one piazza, so this is the level of information that they're giving you about one piazza as an attraction guide, okay? So the attractions are really almost little stars of the show themselves in terms of these articles. They tend to be the longer articles, and that's where you get to include a lot of this history that you might not get to include, here's another one we can just go over. A lot of history that you might not get to include on the actual history page when you're just talking about the history. For instance, here they talk about Roman burials, and they talk about the type of stone that is native to that area and why that's allowed us to have these catacombs.

Okay. But here, I also just pulled this one up because, for instance, here, you'll see that a good bit of this is just straight service, which is very specific, which bus you take from which stop to which stop, how many run during daylight hours, that there's bumps on the cobblestones, exactly where to get off, exactly how far to walk. And a note that the bus is unreliable. So let's get into these last two types. So we've got the accommodation and the restaurant listing. So here, I've got the restaurant listing for you guys.



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

So this is, you'll see, maybe 50 words, maybe less, maybe a little bit more. But this is really common for a restaurant listing. So let's see how it follows the formula. "For a taste of Tuscany in Rome, consider lunch or decadent aperitivi at his Florentine prosciutteria (or salami shop). Made-to-measure taglieri (wooden chopping boards) come loaded with different cold cuts, cheeses, fruit and veg and are best devoured over a glass of Brunello di Montalcino or Chianti Classico. Bread comes in peppermint-green saucepans and dozens of hams and salami dangle overhead. Well-stuffed panini, too, to eat in or take away. Clear your own table before leaving."

So what have we got here? We've got...they're kind of throwing in some Italian words to set the scene, but then they come with the description. They tell you, you get this wooden cutting board that's loaded with all these things and you should drink it with this glass, and they tell you the color of the saucepan and the things are dangling overhead. So this is a mix of service and description, and then we've got some very specific service here at the end, "Clear your own table before leaving."

So in this small space, they've really focused on using description to fulfill service, both at the same time, but while creating very much a visual of what you would expect in this location. Now, let's look at this combination one, and this one is a bit different. I noted in the sadly lost recording that we had this originally, that I am not sure if this important information and quick description that we see down here, which are quite different than this bit above the map, I'm not sure if those would be in the guidebook.

So let's look at this first part that they have the top and look at that on its own first. They say, "This friendly boutique B&B makes for an attractive home away from home in the heart of the elegant Prati district, a single metro stop from the Vatican. It has five bright, playfully decorated rooms—think shimmering rainbow wallpaper, lilac accents and designer bathrooms—and a small breakfast area."

Now, they've got some pretty intense service information down here, and I think this is in part because you actually have the ability to book this. So I think that some of this comes from booking.com. So this description where they say it's on the first floor of an elegant building and it's five minutes from the Vatican, you'll see that this is really restating what they have above.

So let's take this as what would be in the actual guidebook. So we've got that scene setting, right, to the point where they tell us that there's shimmering rainbow wallpaper. We've also got that service. They've got five rooms, if I'm not mistaken, or they don't tell you, oh, five



Dream of Travel Writing

The Guidebook Guide Series – The Writing Side of Guidebook Work

rooms, and it's a single metro stop from the Vatican, and the area that it is in is an elegant district and this is an attractive B&B. And you think not just an attractive B&B, but an attractive B&B for Rome and friendly for Rome.

So they accomplish all of that in this area specifically through the use of these really punchy, descriptive terms here like “lilac accents” and “designer bathrooms,” okay? So, I'm gonna pop back over to the slides. So what I wanted you guys to see as we looked at those, obviously, is to see these things in vivo, as we say in Italy, to see them live, but also to get a sense of how the articles that you're writing can change really dramatically from section to section of the guidebook, and also from guidebook publisher to guidebook publisher, but especially from section to section of the guidebook. But some things to think about if you have embarked on, if you're thinking about embarking on this journey are that if you're writing an entire book, you're probably gonna be writing the later chapters in the book, or sorry, you're gonna be researching later chapters of the book while you're writing earlier ones.

So that means that you can be doing both of these things at the same time, which, actually, creates a really nice feedback loop which means that you're learning how the notes that you tuck need to be better or need to be different or could be better organized to help you with your writing. But the hope in this series of webinars that we've done is that you can get a better sense of what this would look like for you if you did it, and be better prepared if you go into it. So if you're already working on a guidebook, if you're thinking about working on a guidebook, like I said in the first webinar in the series, it's definitely a surprisingly lucrative and steady gig.

I really recommend it to people these days, perhaps not a lot with Lonely Planet, but Moon is really excellent and they're looking for like 20 different guidebooks right now. So just don't forget, you got this contract for like six months or a year. You get this contract for a long time. So take it day by day, and there's just a series of little, tiny, short articles that you have to write. Don't worry about writing a whole book.

So thank you guys so much for joining me for the replay. So I hope you guys have a great weekend, and I will catch you next week to talk about interviews. Cheers.