

Take the Show on the Road: Travel Writing for (Fiction and) Nonfiction
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I. What is “Travel Writing”?

- strictly speaking, nonfiction: books & articles about travel/set in other places
 - “narrative nonfiction” / “memoir” / “travelogue”
 - about individual lived experiences
 - focus: the reader “living along/traveling along” with the writer
 - “travel guides”
 - “how-to” manuals for travel
 - focus: telling other people how to plan/ have their own experiences
 - instructional, not narrative
 - i.e., *what you want to avoid* when “travel writing.”
- Do I have to travel to write travelogue or memoir?
 - Yes. Travel writing is intensely personal and requires “actually going”
 - but “travel” is relative – (see: memoir)
 - A lot of research can (and should) be done online
- How does “travel writing” fit with fiction?
 - all of the skills used in good travel writing apply to fiction too
 - like travel writing, fiction seeks to create an immersive experience
 - everything here applies to settings and narrative focus in fiction too

II. BEFORE YOU GO

1. Establish Your Point of View

- WHY are you telling this travel-related story?
- Travel writing works when the author’s *voice* and *perspective* are compelling
- “Because I want to be paid to go to X” is not compelling
 - (For you, maybe. Not for readers.)
 - What is compelling?
 - Physical/emotional challenges:
 - History/culture:
 - Compelling can be macro (first in the world) or micro (personal-cancer)
 - The best points of view combine both
 - Like the hero in fiction, the travel writer should also *change*

2. Plan Your Trip – and Research, Research, Research

- Learn as much as possible about the places you are going
 - About what you plan to see *and what you don’t*.
- History, culture, food (and language if possible)
- Learning is part of the journey/you learn more if you “see” with context
- Unless the point is getting lost – make a detailed plan before you go.
 - Journal about what you plan to do / see / achieve
 - This is the “outline” for your travel piece.
 - Like all good outlines, be prepared to scrap it.

III. WHILE TRAVELING

1. Journal and Photograph Everything

- Balancing act: being in the moment vs. preserving the moment for posterity
 - Remember: YOU WILL FORGET
 - But memory can be refreshed with notes or photographs
- Journaling: on the phone / voice memo / pen and paper

- Consider using time stamps
- Your pictures can remind you of a thousand words
 - Photograph anything you don't want to forget
 - Photos can also supplement / be included in your work

2. Be Prepared to Ditch the Outline

- "Sometimes, the mountain says no."
- be prepared to change "the plan"
- Watch for opportunities you might not have expected.

3. Take time each night (or morning, or on trains, etc.) to reflect

- Write down/dictate thoughts before and after the experiences
- Impressions in the moment help memory and context

IV. WHEN WRITING

1. Find the Themes

- Sometimes, they're what you expect
- Sometimes, they're not.
- If you need to shift your perspective, it's ok.
 - What's important is a compelling Point of View.
 - If your notes make a different POV more compelling, go for it.

2. Do Not Try to Include It All

- Sift the notes and photographs for:
 - The bits that fit your narrative point of view (including "unexpected")
 - The bits that supplement your PoV
- Beware the "laundry list" – 1. 2. 3. 4. is generally not interesting.

3. Use All Five Senses in Every Scene (to the maximum extent possible)

- Smell is the most evocative- and most underused
- Taste is more difficult, because you must do it deliberately.
 - Please do not lick trees or frogs.

4. Create a photograph with words

- Put the reader there with you, in the moment, every moment.

5. Make it personal

- Balance observation with experience/reaction

6. Don't Gloss Over the Imperfect

- You are the protagonist of the travel narrative
- Sometimes, the hero suffers
- Be someone/do something, that makes readers pull for you/want to ride along