

# Travel Article Templates to Slay the “Intimidation Factor” and Trim Your Writing Time

*“What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.”*  
— Samuel Johnson



When I was in college, I used to flip through glossy travel magazines in the library’s periodical section when I should have been reading something more serious. I’d imagine I was that writer who journeyed through India by train or the one whose job it was to review the newest luxury hotels in Europe. And, I thought, “That kind of writing really doesn’t look very hard.”

Of course, when I finally sat down to write my first travel piece, I discovered pretty quickly that there is more to it than first meets the eye. I was the editor of my university’s newspaper at the time... so I knew the ins and outs of writing a hard-news piece — the proper way to include “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why,” and “how.”

But travel writing required something more. A travel article is not just a report on an event. There are facts, to be sure... but, as we discussed in the last lesson, an emotional pull is critical. And beyond that, there’s a

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formula for keeping a reader with you — that “secret architecture” you learned in Chapter 6 — the promise, picture, proof, and push.

It’s not something you notice when you read a strong travel article. Done well, an article draws you in and carries you along to its end without you even noticing it has done so. Read a poorly written piece, and you’ll find you stumble along, not sure who is doing what or even what you’re meant to think about a place.

Remember my friend Iris who spoke French so well? The key to her success was her understanding of the hidden order of the language — the few truths that applied to whatever she wanted to say. And that is the key to your success as a travel writer.

## Models Worth Mimicking

You can write all sorts of travel articles — short “front-of-the-book” or “postcard” pieces, destination articles, special-interest pieces, stories of your journeys, roundups or surveys, holiday articles, side-trip pieces, reviews. And for each of these, a hidden structure exists... a formula for success.

Just as Iris understood the hidden structure of the French language, so can you understand what makes a travel article really work.

Below are examples of each of the different types of travel articles we’ll tackle. My aim here is to dissect them in a way that you’ll be able to understand immediately how the authors put them together.



Now, I want to be clear — you will find all sorts of other ways to write these same types of articles. I’m not so deluded (and nor should you be) as to think that this is it... this is how it’s done, end of story.

Writers develop their own styles, quirks, allegiances. And those things inform not only their choice of words and their voice, but the way they construct their stories, too.

I have chosen to examine here articles of each type — from destination pieces to reviews — that, I believe, represent those types of articles well. In other words, their structures are sound. They work.

To put it plainly: If you model your own stories after these, you won't go wrong.

In fact, do so well, and your articles will surely grab a reader's attention, create in him enthusiasm for your subject, and convince him to "buy" your idea... whether it's to dine at a new restaurant, stay in a particular hotel in Paris, go scuba diving in Belize, trek through the rainforests of Madagascar...

In short, these are the templates you can rely on to help ease the "intimidation factor" of the blank page, trim the time it takes you to write, and produce articles that really do sell.



## Short "Department" or "Front-of-the-Book" Pieces

One of the best ways to break into the travel writing business is by having a short piece published somewhere — something of 250-600 words in length, typically.

Lots of publications (both those devoted entirely to travel and those that publish only some travel content) are in the market for such things — short pieces about a great restaurant, a notable little hotel, a great travel deal, a new resource, and so on.

Often these sorts of articles appear in specific "departments" at publications or fall under what's called "front-of-the-book" pieces (you've seen them — the "blurbs" magazines often run in the first few pages of each issue).

### 1. Narrow Your Focus

Most important is the scope of such a piece. Because space is limited, so must be the size of the topic you choose. You can't easily write a quick note about well-discovered Rome. Instead, you'd want to narrow your topic considerably to something like a new museum exhibit or maybe a shop that sells unusual gifts.

A caveat: You will, in fact, occasionally see a short article like this about an entire city or a country. But such pieces usually focus on very off-the-beaten-

path destinations — a place most people (or, at least the targeted audience) know nothing about.

## 2. Draw Your Reader in With a “Picture”

In a few minutes, we’ll look at the ins and outs of various full-length feature articles, which offer more generous space for drawing your reader in and developing your ideas.

With these short pieces, however, you can’t waste a minute of time.

That is not to say you shouldn’t make an “emotional” appeal to your reader, do your best to draw him in — you most certainly should. Go ahead, paint a picture of this place you’re writing about. Take the reader there right at the start. Simply understand — you’ve got just three or four sentences to do it.

For example, author Jean Flitcroft (who took this program, by the way) begins a short article titled “An Irish Holiday Secret Even the Irish Don’t Know About,” published in *International Living*, this way:

“I can’t believe my luck. It’s 10 a.m., and I have the 47-acre garden to myself. Sitting by the lake, I look back at the Palladian Mansion and its elegant terraces — the grandeur is breathtaking and the sense of peace absolute.

“The Powerscourt estate, 1,000 acres, sits at the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains, just 12 miles south of Dublin city. The walks through the gardens are cleverly designed so that you stumble on hidden treasures — lily-filled ponds, a pepper-pot tower, elaborate statuary, hidden seats in walled gardens, Japanese gardens, and even the family’s pet cemetery. ‘Little Bots — the dearest little friend for over eleven years, died June 19, 1944.’

And my favorite ‘Sting — died May 21, 1912, aged 12 years. Faithful beyond human fidelity.’ There are 23 gravestones marking the beloved, from dogs to cows.”

### 3. Get Right to the “Promise”

Very close to the front of your article — I’d venture to say within the first four to six sentences (the first one to three in a shorter piece) — you must come straight to the point of your article. To use the same terminology I did in Chapters 5 and 6 — you must state your “promise” immediately.

You’ve got a reader in mind... you’ve drawn that reader in... now write one, concise sentence that tells him the benefit to his being there.

In the Powerscourt estate piece, the promise is already woven into the “picture” to a certain extent. As a reader you already get the sense that this is a very pretty — and perhaps a bit quirky — place.

Nevertheless, the author follows up by saying, quite directly:

“You will find the Powerscourt estate in all the guidebooks, and deservedly so. It’s graciously designed and immaculately maintained. But what you won’t find anywhere is the fact that you can stay on a nightly basis in the apartments in one of the courtyards attached to the house. Even the Irish don’t seem to know about these holiday gems.”

### 4. Provide Specific Support, “Proof”

What next? Follow up with support for your “promise.” To follow our “P’s” here — some “proof” that what you contend is true.

Use a quote or two, some facts, statistics, examples.

The Powerscourt estate piece, which has promised readers “holiday gems even the Irish don’t know about,” we aren’t disappointed. The article goes on to say:

“The five open-planned studios are simply furnished. Most sleep two to three people, but one family apartment sleeps five. They are usually rented to golfers, as the golf course on the estate is one of the most prestigious in Ireland. But the apartments are open to everyone, and while weekends are busy, midweek is often available.

“By staying in the apartments you get free daytime entry to all the estate amenities — the gardens, river walks, shops, café, and the house

exhibition, which traces its history since the 12th century. If you are travelling with kids, the Powerscourt waterfall, at 400 feet, is the highest in Ireland and worth a visit. It's an ideal spot for picnics and has a large play area, with climbing frames, swings, and sand.

"When the crowds go home at 5.30 p.m., slip out of your apartment and take the lime walk with panoramic views over the estate and the Sugar Loaf Mountain. Or head for "The Killing Hollow," where Wingfield (Viscount Powerscourt) is supposed to have killed the last of the O'Tooles (a powerful Irish family). As dusk falls, stroll to the charming village of Enniskerry. Just outside the gates of the estate, it's perfect for drinks and dinner."

## 5. Make Sure There's a "Push"

The "push," you'll remember, is what you need to urge your reader to take action. It's the practical details a reader will need in order to follow up on the information you present in your article.

In the Powerscourt article, the reader finds at the end, for example:

"The apartments are available year-round (\$117 to \$152 per night and \$670 per week). For residents, there is 25% discount on Green Fees, which are normally \$117 in the summer. Contact Powerscourt House, tel. (353)1-204-6033."

## A Few Examples

Because these types of articles are relatively short, I'm going to include a few examples in full here, just to give you a sense for the scope, format, and variety of these short articles.

### **From *International Living***

#### **FINDING REFUGE IN VENICE'S BACAROS**

—*Barbara Groom, Venice, Italy*

*Even with guidebook and map in hand, it was hellish trying to find the bacaros (wine and snack bars) detailed in our guidebook in the back alleys of Venice.*

*We'd think we were on the right track, only to be cut off by a canal coursing across our path. But that's Venice.*

*Bacaros have offered Venetians sustenance for generations. Here, working class and upper crust rub shoulders while lifting a glass of prosecco (sparkling wine). Pull-up-a-stool sorts of places, the bar is laden with substantial snacks, and the local wine is served from kegs. You'll often also find up-market selection in bottles. An ombra (meaning shadow/cloud or umbrella/refuge) is what you order when you want a glass of wine—red, white or the favored sparkling white, prosecco. The more elaborate places, usually called osterie, also serve pastas and simple main courses at crowded tables with paper tablecloths and napkins.*

*The snacks are called cichetti. Marinated fishes...sarde in saor (a Venetian speciality)...folpeti (grilled baby octopus)...fried fish and croquettes...salamis, cheeses, crostini di baccala mantecata (oh, yum), fritatta, polpettone (a deep fried meatball) Try one thing at a time, or ask for a big plate for a selection. Pointing works just fine.*

*Some bacaros open at lunch, others only in the evening. The rush (which can be a crush of bodies) is from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.—the hour of the aperitivo in Italy.*

*If all this talk of food and wine has you tempted but you're afraid you'll never find these elusive establishments remember that a wine keg or demigiano and a drape of grapevine often mark the entrances. Or here are a few that aren't too hard to find.*

*Near the Rialto Bridge is **Do Mori** on a street of the same name. The wine selection is vast, and the long bar is laden with a cichetti. Try their specialty, francobolli—a traditional Venetian mini-sandwich on soft bread with fat layers of filling. This joint is very crowded at lunch and in the evening, so you might be better to go off-peak—say 9 a.m. when many a Venetian is fuelling up for the day.*

*Or try **Ai Rusteghi**, by the Rialto Bridge. Open at lunchtime it serves nothing but mini-sandwiches. Crusty, semi-soft rolls are filled with around 30 different fillings... anchovies and butter, brie and walnuts, lard and rughetta, egg salad, mini-schnitzels, porchetta... There is perching space only, a few benches and ledges for an ombra...or two. By 2 p.m. the staggering stacks of sandwiches have been nearly demolished.*



## From *US Airways Attache*

### **Read 'Em and Eat**

*NOTTING HILL'S Portobello Road has plenty of must-stops among the thousands of stalls that compose its famed Saturday market. For antique-clothing hounds it's Sheila Cook Textiles, for film buffs it's the Electric Cinema with its leather seats and cocktail bar. For food lovers the list is topped by Books for Cooks, which just celebrated its twentieth year in business.*

*Crammed onto tall shelves and piled high on tables are more than 11,000 titles. The exhaustive selection ranges from popular tomes by such cult figures as Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson to hard-to-find translations of thousand-year-old Arabic culinary manuals. But—as your nose instantly registers—this is more than just a well-stocked bookshop.*

*In the rear of the shop, visitors find a test kitchen and tiny cafe. Coffees and luscious cakes (such as the divine Goat Cheese and Fig Cake) are offered daily. The menu changes according to which recipes are to be tested, and what is seasonally fresh in the market. Perennial favorites include Crisp Roast Pork with Fennel and Mustard Lentils and Fresh Sweet Corn Soup with Red Pepper Relish. Lunch service starts at noon and ends when the food runs out, about two hours later.*

*“The test kitchen was originally set up 18 years ago,” says chief buyer Sally Hughes. “It is a vital part of the shop—testing the recipes ensures we really understand the books and know what works.” Such familiarity with the stock allows the staff to help with menu planning and to provide tips and tricks on specific recipes. Those who want to learn more can take advantage of the theme-based workshops offered nearly every day.*

*“It really makes our bookshop so special,” Sally adds. “We truly do live the books here.”*

*With just five tables, no reservations, and plenty of demand, especially on Fridays and Saturdays, there can be a line. But this is one place where that's okay. There are plenty of books to browse while you wait. (For info and hours on Books for Cooks, call (011-44) 20/7221-1992, or visit [booksforcooks.com](http://booksforcooks.com) on the web.) — Jeff Koehler*



## From Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel

### Cool Industrial Tours

*Hidden in the Big Apple, in the heart of the city's pumping financial district, are stacks of gold bars, part of the nation's treasure, at the Italian Renaissance-style Federal Reserve Bank of New York (33 Liberty St., 212/720-6130, [www.ny.frb.org](http://www.ny.frb.org)). On a free hour-long tour, you'll see multitudes of coins and notes from around the world, some thousands of years old, as well as exhibits on the bank's role in the economy. Or take the free Steinway & Sons tour (1 Steinway Pl., 718/721-2600, [www.steinway.com](http://www.steinway.com)) in Astoria, Queens, to witness the exquisite attentions of some 300 craftspeople as they sand, saw, run, voice, and string expensive pianos. New York's beverage industry? At the Brooklyn Brewery (1 Brewers Row, 79 N. 11th St., 718/486-7422, [www.brooklynbrewery.com](http://www.brooklynbrewery.com)) just across the East River here in Williamsburg, you'll see huge copper vats a-brewin' in a 70,000-square-foot space before sitting down in the 300-seat tasting room for sample brewskies. Tours are free on Saturdays from noon to 5 p.m. (All of the above tours require reservations.) — Matthew Link*

## From National Geographic Traveler

### Dispatch/Tanzania

*There is a place in north Tanzania called Lake Manyara Tree Lodge. Here, in Lake Manyara National Park, guests get their own tree house with wraparound porch where, at night, monkeys and bush babies play cards and have disco dances till dawn — at least it sounds that way. My quarters come with two bats. I have my own Masai guard, Setile, who walks me to and fro with a spear and an earth-shattering smile. Setile speaks little English, so we connect through my ability to reproduce sounds — I'm an embarrassing mom who imitates everything from car horns to horses. It's a skill I have never found a deep use for, but it helps Setile teach me the Swahili names for Cape buffalo, lion, warthog, and velvet monkey.*

*During my stay in this wonderful land I see elephants bathing in dust and Lake Manyara covered in the shimmering fuchsia of flamingos. But my fondest memory will become Setile's joy at my animal sounds. It gives us the deep gift of laughter. — Wickham Boyle*



## Template #2

# The Destination Article

A destination article is about a place. Your goal with this kind of article is, in essence, to entice your reader to go there. How you define your place depends on your audience. You learned about that critical issue in Chapter 5 of this program.

If you were writing a story about Scotland for *Walking* magazine, for instance, you'd likely focus on the outdoors. If you were writing about Scotland for *Travel + Leisure*, you might turn your attention, instead, to the luxurious castle accommodations.

## 1. Start with an Anecdote, a Story, a Description

Regardless of your audience and angle, you'll need to bring this place — this destination — to life for your reader. While statistics like the population numbers or the size of the place might come in handy to illustrate a point, they probably aren't going to grab a reader up front. Instead, start with a story, an anecdote. Put your reader in the place you're writing about.

For example, an article by Kristin Kimball on Montserrat, published in *Travel + Leisure*, begins:

"Outside his house in Olveston, on the island of Montserrat, Jeep-rental agent B-Beep Taylor is looking at the sky. A tourist comments on a passing dark cloud: 'Looks like we'll get some rain.'

"'Not rain,' B-Beep replies in his lilting British accent. 'Ash.'"

Another destination piece, this one by Mary Lu Abbott on Thomasville, Georgia, published in *Where to Retire*, opens with these lines:

"Spring days are heady experiences around the Georgia town of Thomasville. A morning mist caresses rolling meadows and old moss-laden live oak and magnolia trees shading gracious plantations, most of which are still privately owned and enjoyed as leisure retreats. Fuchsia, scarlet, and white azaleas and dogwood blossoms give way to roses perfuming the air in preparation for the town's annual rose show, celebrated since 1921.

“Colorfully painted Victorian storefronts house several dozen shops and restaurants facing brick-paved streets downtown, where parking is free and only steps from the stores...”

A third example, this one by Phil Reeves on Chukotka, Russia, published in *World Press Review*, draws its readers in with this lead:

“This is where time present meets time past. A few score miles to the east, across the frozen Bering Sea, lies the international dateline, the United States, and yesterday. Head west across the tundra, and you also traverse back in time. It is here, in Russia’s far northeast, that this millennium will first quietly slide into the next. Yet this is a world that, though permanently ahead of the clock, is heading backward.

“Welcome to Chukotka, a district the size of France which now has only 90,000 people. Welcome, to be more precise, to Anadyr, its capital, where we have arrived as guests of the governor.”

In each of these three articles, the author immediately takes you to the place he or she is writing about.

And that’s what you have to do — start your destination article by transporting your reader to that place.

For the sake of comparison, read through this less-than-gripping lead-in to a destination article that appeared in *Transitions Abroad*:

“Last year, I took an extensive tour of Wales to visit the land of my ancestors: Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales; the Isle of Anglesley, separated by a bridge from mainland Wales; and the castles of Caernarfon, Conwy, and Powys. I found wild scenery, historic buildings, beautiful walks, and educational opportunities for people of all ages.”

It doesn’t exactly make you want to run out and buy a ticket, does it?

Mark Twain once said, “Don’t say the old lady screamed — bring her on and let her scream.” That’s what you need to do. Don’t tell your reader about the destination... take him there.

## 2. Follow Up with an Opinion

So what's next? You've got your reader out of his seat and with you in this place you're writing about... now you've got to keep him there, engage him, entice him to stay.

How? Take a stand. You've got him where you want him... but now you need to tell him what he's doing there. This is where your opinions come in. Your reader has gone along with you this far, because he's been intrigued. But he's about to look you in the eye to find out why you've really brought him there. And you need to tell him.

But that part is easy. You see, all you really need is an opinion. Let your reader in on the real reason you're writing about this place. What, fundamentally, does this destination have to recommend it? What "promise" can you make the reader?

Let's go back to our example about Scotland. I explained earlier that if you were writing for *Walking* magazine, you would likely focus your piece on the outdoors. So, first you set the scene: You're hiking through the highlands, wowed by breathtaking views... but so what?

Now you've got to deliver your reader the "so what."

You might say, for example, "If you're looking for challenging terrain, breathtaking views, and Europe's most affordable outback... this is it."

Or, consider the second example... an article about Scotland for *Travel + Leisure* focusing on luxurious castle accommodations. Again, you start by setting the scene with an anecdote: You're lounging in a wingback chair by your own private fireplace. The bed has been turned down, a hot water bottle placed at the foot to take the chill off the sheets. A knock at the door brings a nightcap — compliments of the house.

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And once you've romanced your reader into this place, you tell him why he's there.

You might say, for example, "Suddenly I understood what 'being treated like royalty' meant. For two weeks, I hopped from castle to castle, discovering the special character of each place and ruining myself forever. You see, once you travel like this... you'll never want to settle for a run-of-the-mill five-star hotel again."

An opinion statement lets your reader see where you're going in this destination. It provides a roadmap for the rest of your piece. So you need to make sure that it does three things well:

-  **1. Your opinion — your message — should be targeted to your audience.** Don't promise readers of *Travel 50 & Beyond* that Dublin is Europe's most kid-friendly city. Promise them that it's the easiest city to navigate or that the pace is ideal for a gentle vacation abroad.
-  **2. Your opinion statement should be the one thing you want readers to come away from your piece believing.** When I write, I often scribble my opinion (this is the "promise" your making) on a piece of scrap paper and tape it to the side of my computer monitor. I want to be absolutely sure I don't forget what it is I want my readers to think.
-  **3. Your opinion should be scaled to fit the size of your article.** If you're writing an all-encompassing, 10,000-word piece about Paris, you'll be covering a lot of ground and your opinion might be sweeping: "Paris is the most romantic city on earth." If you're working with 300 words, however, you'll want to keep your opinion to a more manageable size: "The best seafood restaurant in Paris is owned by a Greek."

Sure enough, you find them in the three destination articles we examined above — on Montserrat, Thomasville, and Chukotka.

*"Montserrat is a do-it-yourself destination: Those who come here are left to make their own fun,"* says the first writer.

*"Hollywood couldn't dream up a more idyllic hometown than Thomasville. It is modern, yet exudes a lifestyle reminiscent of yesteryear,"* writes the second.

*“In Fiji, New Zealand, or Vanuatu, which share the same time zone, the next century’s first view of the world may be idyllic — but not here,”* explains the third.

So now you have set a scene. You’ve made a statement of opinion to let your reader know where you stand and see where you’re going. The rest is simple.



### Quick Tip:

Start looking for destination travel articles in all sorts of publications. Think about the audience, the scene they set, the opinions they offer... and soon you’ll begin to get a sense for the scale of the opinions and for the various ways these opinions appear.

## 3. Prove Your Point

It’s simple... but you must be vigilant. The opinion you offer is really the starting point for the bulk of your article. Now that you’ve said what you’ll be writing about... you have to actually write about it. Every point you make should be in support of your opinion.

Once you’ve written your piece, go back and check on this. Does everything you say serve the point you’re trying to make? If it doesn’t, edit it out.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Before you can start editing, you need something to edit. The material is not so hard to come by.

You see, you have five very useful tools at your disposal — tools to help you prove your point:

- 1. Quotes.** Quotations can offer tremendous support to your cause. Think about it. When you’re making any sort of argument, it’s always helpful to bring in witnesses who can attest to your case. And so it is with travel writing. If you’re contending that Panama offers the best foreign-retiree incentive program in Central America, include a quote from a gentleman who says, “I spent three years looking for the ideal retirement haven, but Panama’s over-60 discounts on everything from airfare to groceries are impossible to beat.”
- 2. Numbers.** Statistics might not grab a reader right off the bat... but they sure can help prove a point. Though it will likely be your scene-setting prose that first attracts your reader to your destination (your appeal to the romantic



in him), you'll find that some interesting numbers will appeal to his more reasonable side. If you're arguing that Belize is a pristine, uncrowded destination, perfect for eco-travel, you might explain that it's the least-populated country in Central America and that off its coast sits the world's second-largest barrier reef.

- 3. Examples.** Once you've stated your opinion, simply back it up with some concrete examples. Just as you relied on an anecdote to launch your story, so can you rely on one here. Tell the reader another story to illustrate your point. If, in your opinion, "Seattle is defined by water through and through," show how that's true. Explain that the wharf, unlike that in San Francisco, is still a working port. Explain that the Center for Wooden Boats is a museum but that much of the fleet is in the water and rents by the hour. Explain that people commute to work by ferry.
- 4. Facts.** Often it's useful to simply trot out some impressive truths. You might recount some quirk of history, some note about a popular tradition, list the number of beaches a certain island has, or tell just how far your destination is from some other point on the globe. Facts come in handy. But make sure you're always employing them in defense of your opinion. Random facts, untargeted, do nothing but distract from your primary purpose of proving your point.
- 5. Comparisons.** Taking one aspect of the place you're writing about and comparing it to another place can quickly help a reader understand more about a destination that is new to him. For example, Bob Morris says in an article from *Caribbean Travel & Life*, "Unlike parts of nearby Sint Maarten/St. Martin, seven miles to the south, Anguilla has largely succeeded in confining sprawl and development by attracting smaller, high-end hotels that don't overwhelm the terrain or detract from the island's precious necklace of beaches." By comparing the islands, he helps us understand how Anguilla — the subject of his article — is distinct.







## Success Clue

The kind of evidence you choose to support your opinion will depend on what that opinion is. While arguably the strongest support you could construct would include some of everything — numbers, facts, examples, quotes, and comparisons — you don't necessarily need all that. Particularly if you are writing a short article around a relatively small idea, you simply won't have the space to make use of each of those devices. Instead, target the ones that make the most sense for your individual article.

Here's a piece I wrote for *International Living*. In it, you'll see I've made use of numbers, examples, facts, and comparisons:

### **Costa Maya: Hot beachfront buys 150 miles south of Cancun... in a newly stable Mexico** by Jennifer Stevens

Fields of mangroves on either side of the road stretched out as far as my eyes could see. Birds flit from tree to tree calling to one another and occasionally drifting on outstretched wings across the long, deserted stretch of two-lane highway where we pressed on at 80 miles an hour, the only car on the road.

Iguanas sunned themselves on the pavement. Squirrels darted across the lanes...not yet wary of vehicles. A fox eyed us from the shoulder before slinking back out of sight.



At intervals, the bottom 30 feet of power-line towers tentatively peeked through the treetops, a testament to progress on its way.

But for now, this lonely stretch of land 70 miles south of Cancun remains quiet, pristine...and home to a spectacular stretch of white sand beach just east of the road

we drove, where the water is warm, clear, and a deep turquoise blue.

This is Mexico's Costa Maya, and it's the best deal in the Caribbean today.

### **Cancun's beach, 1/10 the price**

Earmarked for development, a cruise-ship dock is under construction, airports at the two southerly towns of Majahual and Xcalac are already in place, and electricity, as I said, is on its way — at the current rate, the power will be in all the way to Xcalac by the first of the year.

Yet this infrastructure development has gone on almost unnoticed. And, so, property prices have remained affordable. Half-acre lots on the beach list for a negotiable \$50,000 to \$75,000. Larger tracts reduce that per-half-acre price to as little as \$15,000.

This is the same, spectacular beach you find up north in Playa del Carmen or in Cancun — yet here you'll pay as little as one-tenth what you would in those communities...if you could find the land, that is. Along the Costa Maya, property is less expensive than in Honduras' Bay Islands or in Belize...and it will soon be easier and less expensive to get to as well.

Cancun is an accessible, affordable place to fly in and out of, and regular flights can carry passengers down to Majahual and Xcalac. Or you can drive on well-maintained roads either south from Cancun or, as I did, east from the southern Mexican city of Chetumal.

### **Timing is critical**

This, the Quintana Roo province, is Mexico's next hot spot — no doubt about it. But the thing is, you've got to get in quickly. The deals aren't going to last long. The July 2 election that brought Vicente Fox to power bodes well for this nation's economy.

"There is an overwhelming sense that after four very disruptive government transitions, this will be a normal one," said Paulo Vieira da Cunha, a senior economist with Lehman Brothers in an interview with Reuters. "This candidate comes in with a level of legitimacy that no other Mexican president has had."

Fox, a Harvard-educated former Coca-Cola executive takes power on December 1, and he has pledged to fight corruption and narcotics traf-

ficking and invite increased trade and investment. The markets are already encouraged. In the days immediately following the election, the value of the peso was up against the dollar, interest rates were down, and there was a rise in Mexican bonds. And the man hasn't even taken office yet.

FIDECaribe, the Mexican government agency that's charged with building the infrastructure, plans for low-impact tourism and a marketing strategy meant to attract the "eco-traveler." The unwritten message? This isn't to be another Cancun — at least not in looks. Expect bungalows rather than high rises.

The master plans call for several golf courses and several large hotels. Now that a solidly pro-investment president is poised to take office, it's even more likely than ever that the larger investors needed to fund those kinds of anchoring tourist facilities will come. As it is, the cruise-ship dock - being built by a private investor, in fact - is set to be operational in November. For more information about the infrastructure plans, contact Profra Noemi Canto de Conde, Director General, FIDECaribe; tel. (52)983-2-8432 or 983-2-0084, fax 983-2-2133, email: ficaribe@mpsnet.com.mx.

### **The best — and safest — buys**

But before I get into the nitty-gritty of the numbers, let me give you a better sense for the lay of the land. Find Cancun on your map, and look



south. Just below the town of Tulum, where you can explore the ruins of an ancient Mayan city, begins the 60-mile-long Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. This expanse of protected land provides breeding ground for turtles and native birds, fish, and animal life.

It's possible to buy property here along the coast. But I'd advise against it. As I explored this area, I heard tales of several foreigners who own land in the reserve but who cannot get the building permits to do any-

thing with it. I wouldn't take the risk if I were you. Instead, look farther south, just below the reserve, between Placer and Xcalac. It's here that you'll find the best — and safest — buys.

### **Value for your money**

Every ten miles or so, you can turn east off the long, new north-south highway that runs the length of the Costa Maya from Puerta Herrero in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve to Xcalac. Like driving through the marsh flats in the Florida Keys, these access roads lead to a fine, sparkling white coastline where the water is warm and inviting and a picture-perfect Caribbean blue. In Cancun, the beach is remarkably straight, a feat of nature that has its own appeal. But here, farther south, the coast offers more interest, with shallow coves and inlets that tease the sea into playing on their shores.

The best properties are north of Majahual — not because the beach is altogether nicer, but because the old, rutted, dirt beach road that runs along the coast here is set back farther from the ocean. Here, your lots aren't cut in half by this man-made snake.

Tom Wriley at Trans Caribbean Trust has on offer a fairly wide selection of beachfront lots here, most half an acre in size. One with 82 feet of frontage lists for \$75,000. Another slightly larger, but pie-shaped, piece is 3/4 of an acre and on offer for \$59,000 — a good buy. Half-acre lots with 66 feet of frontage list for \$65,000.

I walked along one larger property, which would make a great hotel site or a housing development. It's a 100-acre tract with 3,280 feet on the ocean on offer for \$3 million. The beach is glorious.

If you buy through Trans Caribbean, you'll spare yourself the usual closing costs of 5-6.5 percent as the firm will cover them. In addition, Tom explained that he'll have your lot cleared for you once and arrange for the formation of your Mexican corporation, too. For more information about these lots, contact Tom Wriley at Trans Caribbean Trust, tel. (52)987-32498, fax 987-32537, email: [beaches@transcaribbeantrust.com](mailto:beaches@transcaribbeantrust.com), website: [www.transcaribbeantrust.com](http://www.transcaribbeantrust.com).

I explored the beaches south of Majahual with a local landowner who had the inside scoop on nearly every piece of beach. And he owned

quite a few himself. Commercial lots of about half an acre stretching from the new pier to the little town of Majahual have about 60 front feet each and list for \$80,000. In this area, called “Benque Soya,” there remains a string of 14 lots together, so you have room to expand.

Ten years ago, this land sold for closer to \$15,000 a lot but today it’s already going for \$60,000 to \$80,000. At the low-priced end are the lots at Santa Julia five miles north of Xcalac where the road runs pretty close to the water and cuts the \$60,000 lots in half. For more information about these lots and others, contact Jorge at fax (52)99-2-23027.

**[SIDEBAR]** (A sidebar is a short, often boxed, ancillary story that is printed alongside a longer article and typically presents additional information.)

### **A new way to own property in Mexico**

Until recently, the only way to own property on a Mexican beach was to form a Mexican Trust, usually valid for 50 years, that was held in a Mexican bank. And for the privilege of owning this trust, you paid \$300-\$400 a year in maintenance fees.

No longer. Today you can form a Mexican corporation. You need at least two people on the board — you and a colleague — but this corporation can be 100 percent foreign owned. It will cost you between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to set up, but you won’t have to contend with the annual fees. In addition, your corporation can own more than one piece of land (not the case with the trust).

Attorney Melba Peniche at tel./fax (52)99-28-00-22 comes well recommended.

**[SIDEBAR]**

### **Where to stay**

Fiesta American has built a beautiful hotel just outside of Majahual, but at present it sits unoccupied — the opening has apparently been delayed by some political controversy — or so goes the story I heard. Your best bet is one of the handful of small beachside hotels that dot the shore.



Two near Xcalak are Costa de Cocos where you'll stay in one of 14 bungalows on the beach — rustic but very comfortable — for \$49 a night in summer and \$75 a night in winter for a double. Contact Costa de Cocos, tel. In the United States (888)968-6181, email: [cocos@astro.net.mx](mailto:cocos@astro.net.mx), web site: [www.costadecocos.com](http://www.costadecocos.com).

Or stay with Andy and Ruth Sanders, a retired couple from Minnesota, at their Sandwood Villas, also in Xcalak. They have three apartment-villas available, each with two bedrooms, two baths, and a fully furnished kitchen. They are right on the beach and have nice balconies overlooking the sea. One or two people per unit stay for \$59 to \$79 per night, depending on the season; three people stay for \$69 to \$99; and four people stay for \$79 to \$119. Contact Sandwood Villas, tel./fax (52)983-10034, email: [andrew@astro.net.mx](mailto:andrew@astro.net.mx) or [scubadad@ecosur.com.mx](mailto:scubadad@ecosur.com.mx), web site: [www.xcalak.com](http://www.xcalak.com).

## [SIDEBAR]

### Hunting down value

In the early 1970s, property along the northern Mexican Caribbean — then a deserted strip of beach with no electricity, no phones, and one sorry, sand road — sold for a song. In Cancun in 1976, land changed hands for \$3.70 a square foot. Today it sells for 19 times that.

Yet along Mexico's southern Caribbean — the Costa Maya, between Placer and Xcalak — you can still find very good buys. Modern infrastructure — including electricity, phone lines, ship docks, airports, hotels, and golf courses — is in the works right now. Yet property here is still selling for one-tenth what you'd pay in Cancun. This is arguably the best value you'll find anywhere in the Caribbean.

<b>Location</b>	<b>US\$ price for a beachfront lot of 66 x 150 feet</b>
<i>Cancun</i>	\$700,000
<i>Playa del Carmen</i>	\$500,000
<i>Cozumel</i>	\$375,000
<i>Tulum</i>	\$310,000
<i>Costa Maya</i>	\$59,000

*(Figures from Trans Caribbean Trust)*

## 4. Wrap It Up

The end of your article shouldn't mimic your introduction, but it should echo it. Or, more precisely, it should echo your theme... your opinion.

- You could restate what it is you've been proving all along.
- Or, if you started out with a certain scene, you might take your reader back there.
- Or, you might offer one last piece of telling proof to really cement your ideas — maybe a quote, or a statistic, or a fact.

Let's look at how the three articles we've been following up until now wrap it up in the end. Each writer takes a different approach.

The Montserrat piece concludes with an echo of the conversation overheard in the introduction:

"Outside the observatory, a pair of Volcano Guys are having lunch and discussing weekend plans.

"So, will you play cricket tomorrow, then?' one asks.

"I guess so,' his friend replies. 'Last time, you know, we got ashed out.'"

The writer of the Thomasville article makes use of the last paragraph to offer some final bits of evidence and a quote that sums up her earlier opinion:

"Overall, the couples find the cost of living here about the same or easier on the pocketbook. They all would recommend that others consider Thomasville for retirement. 'Come see it and talk to the people,' says Marjorie. 'I can't imagine anyone not liking Thomasville.'"

In the conclusion to the Chukotka article, the writer calls to mind the opinion he offered early on about this place being the end of the earth:

"God has forgotten this place!" she bellows, trembling. 'We gave everything to the Motherland! But we have nothing now!'

"We leave, uneasy, unable to offer any suggestion that would help her or the others in this abandoned place to weather the first years of the new millennium."





### **Three-in-One (a Destination Article in Disguise)**

While you can write a straight destination piece, a sort of “all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-fill-in-the-name-of-the-place” article, that’s a big project to commit to. And you’ll likely find that you have more luck, in fact, selling a destination in more easily digestible chunks.

This makes the writing easier — you aren’t faced with the mammoth task of learning everything there is to know about a place — and, often, more lucrative.

We talked a bit about this earlier, in Chapter 5. You can travel to one destination and sell multiple stories about it. It all comes down to your audience. What would different groups of people like to know about any one particular place? That’s the question to ask yourself.

And I should make one other point here, too. Remember, you don’t have to get on an airplane to write destination articles. You don’t have to travel at all. Think about where you live. Right in your own backyard, you’ll find all sorts of “destinations.” You could write about your city for an overseas magazine or take on a smaller focus and write for a regional publication about your city’s best antique shops, the new children’s museum, or the tulip gardens that invite spring visitors.



### **The Special-Interest Article**

A common variation on the standard destination article is the special-interest article. Essentially, a special-interest article deals with a specific activity as it relates to a destination. Special-interest articles might be about gardening in England, cycling in France, alternative healing in Guatemala, volunteering in Botswana, shopping in Rome, cooking in Spain... you get the idea.

But no matter what the “special interest,” your article should follow essentially the same pattern I laid out for the destination piece.

Start by grabbing your reader’s attention with an anecdote, story, or image. State your opinion. Back it up with evidence. Then close with a statement that echoes the opinion in some way.

Here, in an article by Joe Fisher published in *Caribbean Travel & Life*, the author focuses on Bermuda's little-known rail trails. He uses the standard destination article structure — set a scene, state an opinion, follow up with proof and a conclusion. I've included the lead and opinion statement here for you to see how he gets started:

“As a seven-year-old during World War II, Sonia Holder used to press an ear to the track of the Bermuda Railway, her heart racing with excitement as she heard the compelling rumble of the ‘iron horse’ heading her way.

“‘Aaah, such a nice noise,’ recalled Holder. ‘It sounded like the wooden wheels of my father’s old-fashioned wheelbarrow being pushed over stones. None of us wanted to get up from the rails and walk away.’

“The silvery-haired Holder is now a tour guide along the Bermuda Railway Trail, a hiking path and bridleway that offers visitors a glimpse at a secret side of the island and lets locals relive the past.”

Now let's examine a second special-interest article. In this one, too, you'll see the same internal structure at work. This piece on teaching English in Russia by Charity Ryabinkin, was published in *Transitions Abroad*. Here, again, is the lead and opinion statement:

“Walking down the frosty streets of Vladimir, one is hard pressed to find any signs of Western culture. All around are symbols of old Russia: the glorious Golden Gates, the imposing Uspenskii Sobor, the babushkas selling potatoes at the markets. In contrast to Moscow and St. Petersburg, it is nearly impossible to find a billboard written in English. Vladimir is, in almost every respect, hardcore Russian.

“Or so it would seem. Ask any cab driver in town what ‘letne-per-evozinksaya, house 3’ means and he'll say, ‘That's the address of the American Home.’ Talk to the English-speaking students at the Pedagogical Univ. and many of them will tell you they study at the American Home. In short, the American Home has become something of a legend in this sleepy winter wonderland. With approximately 250 students taking classes every semester, the interaction between Russians and Americans has reached new heights.”

Once again, the key to creating special-interest articles that sell is audience. Narrow the focus of your article by narrowing your audience. Write an article about shopping for shoppers, a piece on gardens for gardeners, a story on cycling for cyclists. If you've done the right research, you'll find that you can write all three — about one destination.



## Template #4

### The Side-Trip Article

Another variation on the destination article is the side-trip article. Like the special-interest article, this, too, follows the same formula you've already learned — anecdote (or story or description), opinion, support, conclusion. The side trip is simply another way of slicing the destination pie.

Just as a special-interest article helps you to narrow your focus, so can a side-trip piece. Start in a primary destination — your city... or any city anywhere in the world — and then look out from there. Where could you spend a day or a weekend? It should be someplace that is easy to get to. And it should offer some departure from the rigors of daily life. Readers like to learn about places they won't necessarily find in guidebooks.

In *Southern Living*, Les Thomas' side-trip article about Frederick, Maryland begins:

**“Even though Frederick is the second-biggest city in Maryland, it’s the little things that make it an inviting place to spend a weekend. Little things like fireworks sparkling over the baseball park on Friday night, the delicious aroma of fresh bread wafting from the doorway of a street-front bakery on Saturday morning, or the sweet taste of a ripe cherry picked in an orchard.”**

Elizabeth Bumiller writes in a *New York Times* article about a weekend excursion to visit suffragists' homes in upstate New York. Her article begins:

**“I am at the boiling point!” Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to Susan B. Anthony about the fledgling women’s rights movement in the spring of 1852. ‘If I do not find some day the use of my tongue on this question, I shall die of an intellectual repression, a woman’s rights convul-**

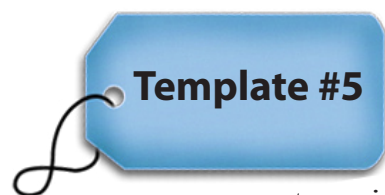
sion! Oh, Susan! Susan! Susan! You must manage to spend a week with me before the Rochester convention, for I am afraid that I cannot attend it...How much I do long to be free from housekeeping and children, so as to have some time to read and think and write.'

"Stanton's cry of frustration was sent from Seneca Falls, N.Y., her unhappy home on the outskirts of what was then a depressing 19th-century mill town. Anthony, who would be her friend and collaborator in the fight for suffrage over the next half century, was in Rochester in a prosperous neighborhood of merchants and bankers, an enormous psychic distance but only 50 miles on the map. Jane Hunt, who was the host of the 1848 tea party that first gave birth to the women's rights convention, was only three miles from Seneca Falls, in Waterloo, N.Y. Mary Ann M'Clintock, whose home was the site for the drafting of the Declaration of Sentiments read by Stanton at the Seneca Falls convention, was in Waterloo, too."

I should point out that this second example of a side-trip article is really part side-trip and part special-interest travel. The author has given her weekend trip a theme — a visit not just to one place, but to a series of places close to one another and linked by a common thread — suffragists' homes.

And this is a perfectly acceptable way to redefine the destination article. In fact, once you start reading travel articles with an eye to the structures that underpin them, you'll see that many articles don't fall easily into one particular category. And that's fine. A review might also be part destination piece. The story of a journey might also be a side-trip article. A special-interest story might be, in part, a survey.

As long as the fundamentals of the structure are still in place, you can play all you want with the "type" of articles you write.



## Template #5

## The Holiday or Special-Event Article

A holiday or a special event, like a festival, can give you an excuse to write about a place. If a country or city practices some dis-

tinct tradition to go along with a special day, that can provide the perfect angle for your article.

Again, follow the structure you would for any destination article... but simply focus your attention not on the destination generally but on what, specifically, the place has to recommend it at holiday or festival time.

Steenie Harvey wrote in *International Living* about Guy Fawkes Night in England, for example. Her piece begins:

"I grew up in England, and Guy Fawkes Night — better known as "Bonfire Night" — was always a banner event. We saved our pocket money for weeks before the November 5th event, and then blew the lot on fireworks. We got extra money by asking neighbors and any passing stranger for 'a penny for the Guy.'

"Our 'Guys' were rag-stuffed dummies, which we dressed in our dads' old clothes and pushed around in prams. Lazy kids didn't make a Guy — they prowled the streets with little human substitutes instead. I tried it once, smearing my younger sister's face with soot and forcing her to sit crammed in a pram, dressed in oversized blue overalls and a flat tweed cap...

"Nowadays, the most popular way to spend Guy Fawkes Night is at organized bonfire parties in town parks — firework displays are far bigger, better, and safer than our old backyard affairs. Even so, kids continue to demand their 'penny for the Guy,' and you can still break your jaw with bonfire toffee."

Thomas R. and Deborah A. Fletcher wrote a piece that appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* about a Maple Syrup Festival in West Virginia. It starts out:

"Deep in the heart of the hardwood forest in West Virginia's Randolph county, along a fork of the Buckhannon River, lies the small town of Pickens.

"During the winter, Pickens is fairly sleepy, but come March, things turn sweet.

"During the annual Maple Syrup Festival (March 18-19 this year), folks come down from the hills and hollows to socialize, listen to music, sell crafts made during the winter, and feast on pancakes with locally produced maple syrup."

One thing to keep in mind about holiday or special event articles: Publications often want them in hand months ahead of the actual holiday or event. And so that means that if you're in, say, Santa Fe, New Mexico at Christmastime this year and decide you'd like to write a story about why it's the ideal place to shop for presents, you'll probably want to pitch your story idea to an editor in the spring of next year so it appears in time for next Christmas.

Similarly, if you're going to write about an annual arts and crafts fair in Baltimore, Maryland, for example, you'll want to visit the fair this year so you can write about it in time to find enthusiastic readers just before next year's event. That is what the Fletchers did with their Maple Syrup Festival article. It appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* February 6, 2000... in time to promote the March 18-19 festival to readers.



## Template #6

## The Round-up or Survey Article

This type of article is not difficult to master once you understand the fundamentals of the destination and journey articles. A round-up or survey article is nothing more than a collection of short snippets about places linked by a common thread.

You'll see these articles in nearly every publication — “101 Trips for the Best Summer Yet,” “The Road to America’s Best Folk Art,” “Semiretire! 7 Great Places to Consider,” “15 Top Hotels with Vacation Bang for Your Buck”...

The list is endless. But, as I said, the fundamentals are the same. There are two ways to approach the lead to a round-up or survey article:

### 1. Set It Up with a Summary Lead

If you take this approach, you simply (and directly) tell your reader why you've put this article together and how it will help him.

The editors at *Caribbean Travel & Life* introduce a series of shorts on eight top Caribbean destinations this way:

**“Whether you’re a nuevo-reef snorkeler or an unrepentant underwater voyeur with a three-tank-a-day habit, the Caribbean is waiting to**



be your playground. But where are the best places for exploring coral canyons, swimming with dolphins, or winding your way through an old wreck?

“The list is long, but we’ve picked some favorites. Just remember — it’s a wonderful world out there and a mask and fins are all you need to get through the looking glass.”

Or...

## 2. Set It Up with an Anecdote or a Scene from Your Travels

Another way to approach the lead to a round-up or survey article is to start by setting a scene, by taking your reader to one of the spots you’ll include in your article.

Candyce H. Stapen starts her round-up piece about off-season savings on family vacations in the Caribbean, published in *Vacations*, this way:

“Not 15 minutes past check-in at Franklyn D. Resort at Runaway Bay on a languid Jamaican afternoon, I was sitting beachfront in a lounge chair dangling my toes in the ocean when Unalee, our ‘vacation nanny,’ brought me iced coffee, sandwiches, and the news that she had introduced my daughter, Alissa, then 12, to Katie, another seventh-grader. ‘Smart lady,’ I thought. Then Unalee excused herself to stock our refrigerator with soda, juice, cold cereal, crackers, cheese, fruit, and a few bottles of Red Stripe. No charge, and no trouble.”

## 3. Your Lead Dictates the Way You Follow Through

If you choose the first kind of lead, then you’d simply follow up by starting with the first destination you’ll discuss in your article, writing a quick “destination piece” about it, and then moving on to number two... and so on.

Most often, these destinations are separated by subheads. A subhead might simply be the name of the place, but more often, it will have a tag line with it. Sometimes you’ll see survey articles whose subheads include tag lines only to tease the reader into reading to find out where the place is. If you’re writ-



ing this kind of article for a particular publication, flip through that publication first to see how the editors tend to organize these sorts of reports.

In the *Caribbean Travel & Life* article, the subheads include the place name and a tag line. For instance: “Belize: Blue Holes and Exotic Atolls” and “Saba: The Pinnacle of Diving.”

In the *Vacations* article, there are, in fact, no subheads. The writer links the destinations with narrative sentences. For instance: “If FDR is an especially good choice for parents with tots, then the Wyndham El San Juan Hotel and Casono at Isla Verde, Puerto Rico, is the place to go with twenty-somethings.” And “For economical and functional family reunions, St. Lucia’s Stonfield Estates, offering a manor house and 10 separate villas, is another good choice.”

#### 4. Let the Article Come to its Logical End

Rather than worrying about wrapping up this type of article, you can simply stop when you’re done. In a round-up or survey article, you set out in the beginning the parameters of your coverage. The reader knows up front how the various pods — the short destination pieces — are linked. You don’t have to sum up anything at the end.

If your story is “The Five Best Retirement Destinations in the World,” you start out with an introduction that sets the stage for what’s to come and you simply address each of the five destinations — one at a time. At the end of the fifth... you’re done. So stop. You don’t need any fancy round-up language at the close.



#### Template #7

### The Review Article

A review article is usually a fairly short piece — a few hundred to 1,500 words. You’ll see reviews of all sorts of things. In car magazines, writers review new seats, new engines, the year’s new cars. In food publications, writers review restaurants and new kitchen products. In electronics magazines, it’s stereo receivers and speakers.

In travel magazines... you might be surprised to see reviews of all of the above. You see, as a travel writer you might write a review about rental cars in a particular destination. You might review a restaurant or a hotel in a town you've recently traveled to. If some company just developed a new line of tiny radios, perfect for traveling with, you might review those.

There are three types of review articles you'll see commonly:

1. A review article about just one item or one place.
2. A review article that's really a review-survey in which you compare various products or places.
3. A review article that is really a special-interest destination article and focuses on, say, "The 10 Best Restaurants in Madrid" or "Five Italian B&Bs with Fabulous Views."

Here I'm going to focus on the review of a single place. Once you understand how to write that... the other kinds of review articles are easy. You already know how to write a survey article, and you already know how to write a destination article. When you throw "review" into the mix, the theme of the items you're reviewing — whatever that common thread is — will provide the focus for your article.



### **Insider Tip:**

While restaurant reviews in newspapers will sometimes be negative... you'll rarely see that kind of review in a travel publication. Their readers are looking for ideas about where to go, where to stay, where to eat... and they don't want pages and pages about what not to do.

That said, there's absolutely nothing wrong with being very honest about a place. If you think it's a bit overpriced, say so. If a hotel is fabulous in nearly every way, but you found the hotel food a bit heavy, say as much.

All right, let's get started...

## 1. Start Out with a Scene or an Anecdote

Nothing new here. Start your review by taking your reader to the place you'll be reviewing. Set the scene. Entice your reader to come with you.

Christopher Mason's review of Glin Castle in Ireland, published in *Travel + Leisure*, begins this way:

"With its façade of battlements and its Gothic follies, Glin Castle appears somewhat daunting as it looms above the river Shannon in County Limerick. Inside, however, it's hard to imagine a more welcoming and intriguing place to stay."

In his review of an unusual B&B in New Mexico, Steve Larese opens his *National Geographic Traveler* article this way:

"I'm standing on a sun-baked mesa in New Mexico's northwestern Four Corners region holding a suitcase. My wife, Trish, is scowling. 'This is your idea of a B&B?' she asks in a tone conveying frost even in the desert heat."

## 2. Tell Your Reader Where He Is

Just as with any destination article, let your reader know where it is, exactly, that you've taken him. Give him a sense for the place so that he'll begin to know if it's something that would appeal to him or not.

Christopher Mason's Irish castle review continues this way:

"'We're very proud of our power showers,' says Olda FitzGerald, basking in compliments about the efficiency of the 18th-century castle's plumbing as we tuck into a breakfast of scrambled eggs from the Gothic henhouse. 'Quite right,' adds her husband, Desmond, the 29th Knight of Glin. 'None of those terrible dribbles you get elsewhere.'"

"Beyond the castle gates in the village of Glin stands a fortress owned by the knight's ancestors, who gained their title in the 14th century. Now a gaping ruin, the fort was destroyed in 1600 and serves as a haunting reminder of the vagaries of the family's fortunes."

Reading that, you begin to understand the grand scope of the estate that is Glin Castle... but you also understand the welcoming warmth and ease of its owners.

Steve Larese's New Mexican B&B piece, likewise, tells you enough up front about this hotel that you begin to decide whether it's a place that would appeal to you:

*"...As we follow Black down the canyon rail toward the cave's entrance, I notice several pipes jutting up through the sandstone. We are walking on the cave's roof.*

*"We cut down the side of the mesa along a rough path, getting a raven's view of the cottonwood-lined La Plata River 350 feet below. A sign on the trail reads, 'The Blacks,' paired with an image of Kokopelli, the mythical flute-playing deity of happiness that Native Americans have chiseled into the rock of the Southwest for centuries. The sign looks strange stuck in the side of a canyon in the middle of nowhere — until I see the gas grill."*

### **3. Offer Specific Details About the Place**

The next order of business in a review article is to give readers some very concrete details about this place that they might want to visit. If it's a hotel you're reviewing, tell them how many rooms it has and describe one or two. If it's a restaurant, tell them, specifically, what you ate and some details about what else is on the menu.

Christopher Mason describes everything from the tweed jacket the Irish knight sports to the number of rooms, the views they offer, even what the wallpaper looks like.

Similarly, Steve Larese describes the cave's layout, the paintings on the walls, and even tells you exactly what's stocked in the refrigerator.

### **4. Close with an Image or a Summary Statement**

As you might in a journey article, close your review by taking your reader back to a moment you spent in this place that you're reviewing. Or, instead, you can

end your review by summing up your experience there. That summary might, indeed, be a sentence that encapsulates your thoughts about the place. But it could just as easily be a quote by someone else that says it for you.

That's how Christopher Mason ends his Irish castle article:

"...Next year they hope to add two more bedrooms to the sprawling west wing. 'You only live once and you have to take some risks,' the knight says. 'Anyway, it's fun to do. There are very few houses left in Ireland that contain their original objects, so one's preserving a fairly rare bird.'"

Steve Larese's cave B&B review closes this way:

"After dinner, we lay down by the kiva's roaring pinon fire and planned the next day's visit to the Anasazi cliff-dwelling ruins at nearby Mesa Verde National Park. Then we settled back to gaze into our cave fire (after I got my bad Plato joke over with), hidden away from the rest of the world in our very own cliff dwelling. We decided that Kokopelli wasn't so mythical after all."

## 5. Don't Forget the Name and Contact Information

Last, but not least, don't forget to include the name and contact information for the place you're reviewing. For guidance as to the best way to include it, look through a sample of the publication for which you're writing. Most publications print the contact information at the end of the piece, in a "contacts" box.

You'll likely need specifics like phone and fax numbers, web site and email address, pricing, and possibly a short list of the kind of foods served for a restaurant or the kinds of activities available for a hotel.



### Template #8

## The Journey Article

Similar to a destination article... but not quite the same thing... is a journey article. The difference is that this kind of story focuses as much — often more — on how you get from one place to another as on the

destination itself. It's frequently a story of discovery — not only the discovery of a place you're traveling through, but of people, of ideas, and often of you, the author, as well.

A journey article should invite your reader to join you on your trip. Just as a destination article begins by putting the reader in the place you're writing about, so should a journey article. And the story should carry him along with you in your discoveries... your joys... your misadventures.

But just as some people are better travel companions than others... so are some journey articles better companions for the armchair traveler.

So how do you ensure that your journey is one readers will enjoy? It comes down to one thing: You must show restraint.

You see, even though you might think it would be the easiest thing in the world to tell your own story about your own trip... it's easy to say too much.

Think about it this way: Have you ever seen a mother show one of her children's wedding pictures to an elderly neighbor woman who couldn't be there for the big day? She never shows two or three photos. She pulls out at least 100 photos... and flips and flips and flips...

“That's my Aunt Betty from Louisiana. And that's Uncle Bill. His son was disbarred last March, but he's nevertheless managed to stay married to that tall blond you saw in that picture two rolls back.”



A handful of snapshots would suffice.

And so it is with a journey article. Give the reader highlights, telling moments, surprises... but don't tell him what brand of floss you use in the morning.

That said, let's move on to the actual structure of a journey article. Though you'll find countless examples of articles that stray in one way or another from this formula, you'll find that every good journey article includes these elements.



At times, their order might change. But you'll find them there. And they create the internal structure that holds a journey article together.

## 1. Set a Scene

Just as you do with a destination article, you want to bring your reader to the place where you're traveling. Set a scene. Tell an anecdote. If you've been hopping from B&B to B&B in rural France, take your reader to one of them... and show him what he's missing. If you're writing about a jungle trek in Madagascar, describe where you are at one moment in one day.

But don't take too long in doing it. Remember, show restraint.

David Goodman writes about a family vacation to Belize in *Outside* magazine's Family Vacation Guide 2000:

"I peered over the edge of the boat at the sharks that surrounded us. Three of the gray predators swam expectantly in circles, followed closely by a half dozen stingrays. Doing my best to ignore the knot of fear in my tightening gut, I calmly turned to my seven-year-old daughter and said, 'jump in!'"

"Ariel leaped into the water, and as a nurse shark moved toward her, she tossed it a dead fish. The beast bared its teeth, snatched the food, and swam away slowly as Ariel stroked the length of its body. Back on the surface, she bellowed through her snorkel, 'That was cool!'"

Marybeth Bond opens her journey article about a solo bike trip in Ireland, published in *Islands*, this way:

"After three hours of slogging over the hills through the ever-present Irish mist, I heard a hiss from my front tire and knew I had a problem. It had been hours since I'd seen the sun, my leg muscles screamed, and my rear end burned. My only company, some black-and-white cows plodding across the road, were indifferent."

Kenneth Brower writes at the outset of his journey article about New Guinea, published in *National Geographic Traveler*:

"The doctor's wife, through the intermediary of her husband, was bar-



gaining for a flute. 'Ask his second price,' she insisted. 'Offer him eight.' The barefoot carver was asking ten kina, or about four dollars, for a piece that had taken him many hours. The doctor's wife was determined to shave off a dollar. A young Papuan woman watched uncomfortably. Haggling is bad manners in Papua New Guinea, as our guides had often advised us."

## 2. Back Up and Tell Your Reader Where You Are and Why You're There

Once you've drawn your reader in, step back for a moment and tell him where he is. Or, rather, tell him what you're doing there. You can do this in one simple sentence, in fact, though you may want to devote a full paragraph or even more to it. The amount of space you devote to this "orientation" will likely depend on where it is you're traveling.

If you're in a place your readers will be familiar with, you probably need only a few lines to orient them. But if you're writing about some very exotic locale, you'll want to devote more space to telling them where you are and why you're there.

The length of your article — its scope — will also influence the amount of space you devote to this orientation. If you've got thousands of words to work with, go ahead and spend a paragraph or two telling your reader where you are. If you've got considerably fewer words, cut this section accordingly.

David Goodman continues his piece about his family's vacation in Belize this way:

"Belize is full of such counterintuitive little wonders. My wife, Sue, and I were lured there largely because of the beach-and-jungle adventure opportunities packed into a country the size of Vermont."

Marybeth Bond's *Islands* article about Ireland continues with these lines:

"For ten hypnotic days I had cycled, without a glitch, along the Ring of Kerry and through the Dingle Peninsula in southwest Ireland. I had wheeled down narrow roads aflame with red fuchsia and yellow gorse,

through frog-green hills crossed with stone walls, dotted by medieval ruins, and grazed by baaing sheep. Gliding through myriad shades of green, I felt the earth roll by under my pedals, smelled the peat bricks burning, and tasted the salty air of the coast, where the ocean foamed onto the rocky shore.

“This was my first trip to Ireland, and I was traveling alone. Had I booked a tour with a bicycle company, a support vehicle and a guide would have come to my rescue to repair my tire. But an organized bike trip didn’t fit my loose schedule or my slim budget; I was rambling around the world on a shoestring. My vehicle was a heavy black rented bike with a basket in front, like the wicked neighbor lady rode in *The Wizard of Oz*. I stashed my bags in the basket, spent my nights in small B and Bs, and ate in local pubs.”

And Kenneth Brower delivers his “orientation” to New Guinea with this one sentence:

“This would not be the last moment of cultural shock as we 12 Americans (plus one Briton) continued our tour up the Sepik River and deeper into this eastern half of the huge, 1,500-mile-long island of New Guinea. (Indonesia controls the western half, Irian Jaya.)”

You’ll notice with each of these leads, the writer doesn’t start at the beginning, but rather takes up somewhere in the middle of his or her tale. Even though a journey article is an account of a voyage, you needn’t start on day one and tell your story in a strictly chronological manner. You can... but it’s often more interesting (and less predictable) if you do not.

### **3. Provide a Context with Facts, Quotes, or Statistics**

Once you’ve drawn your reader in by taking him to a place on your journey, and once you’ve stepped back from that microcosmic look at your trip to tell him where you are and what you’re doing there... now is the time to fill him in a bit about the place you’re exploring.

You needn’t tell your reader everything there is to know about the country or city or wilderness. This is the time to begin with a few telling facts, maybe use

a quote from somebody that offers some information about this place where you find yourself, or drop a few statistics.

This is only the first of many opportunities you'll have to fill your reader in on the facts and figures that describe this destination... so you want to give him just enough to keep him interested, and then you'll go back to the "story" itself.

David Goodman's Belize article is quick about this:

*"The only English-speaking nation in Central America, Belize contains the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere, a rainforest teeming with wildlife and 540 species of birds, and thousand-year-old Mayan ruins scattered throughout the countryside."*

In Marybeth Bond's Ireland piece, she nearly skips this step altogether. She's writing about Ireland, after all, a destination most readers know a good deal about. And so rather than waste space telling you about the size of the Emerald Isle or the population numbers, she cuts right to the "why I'm here" information. She says:

*"For me the advantage of exploring rural Ireland by bicycle was the slow pace. I could stop often, breathe the fragrant air, absorb the verdant landscape... and remember every heart-pounding hill that passed under my wheels."*

Kenneth Brower, in his New Guinea article, puts the island in its anthropological context:

*"New Guinea! The science of cultural anthropology was invented, really, in this last great bastion of the Stone Age. The hundreds of languages and myriad societies of this island have drawn anthropologists as to no other land. Anthropology cuts both ways, of course. While the anthropologists observe, they are being observed. As Information Age met Stone Age on the Sepik, I was keeping my eyes peeled in both directions."*

## 4. Return to Your Narrative

Once you've given your reader some context to fill out his knowledge of this place where you're venturing, then you can go tidily back to your narrative — the fun stuff.

You have a couple of options at this point. Either pick back up where you left off, continuing the story you started your article with, or give your reader a second scene, a new anecdote or situation.

David Goodman's Belize piece takes you back to the scene where his daughter is swimming with the sharks, offering you not only some more imagery about the place, but some additional "facts" as well:

"We ended up swimming with the sharks while snorkeling in the Hol Chan Marine Reserve, a five-square-mile swath of the Caribbean Sea protected from fishing and prized for its rich marine life (one-fifth of Belize is similarly protected in nature reserves). The nurse sharks and stingrays have become accustomed to divers and don't even flinch at the sight of a seven-year-old human in a pink diving mask. The flinching is left to us parents."

The Ireland article by Marybeth Bond picks up back on the road where she's got a punctured tire:

"But now, with a leaking tire and a soggy spirit, it was time to break for a coffee and scone — or better yet, a Guinness. From the crest of the next hill, I saw cottages with gray slate roofs in the distance. One chimney rose above the others, pouring out the signature plume of peat smoke. I figured it was the village pub.

"After a few more minutes of low-tire pedaling, I was there. As I tramped into the pub's inviting warmth, I felt conspicuous — but the man behind the worn wooden bar put me at my ease. When he served my Guinness, he grinned and asked, 'Can you sing?'"

And the New Guinea piece, too, takes you right back to the place you started:

"I studied the doctor's wife. Beneath her silver earrings and the heavy

makeup she always wore, I saw signs of surgical enhancement. The face of the Papuan woman, for her part, was tattooed with three blue lines — a trident — radiating backward from the corner of her eyes. Our cosmetic experts remove the crow's-feet. Papuan experts add them.”

## 5. And the Cycle Starts Over Again...

If you've duly marked down the elements of a journey article that you've learned up until this point...

- to set a scene
- to explain where you are and why
- to provide some context with facts, quotes, or statistics
- to return to your narrative

...then you know what you need to about the structure. Because what follows is simply more of the same. You can repeat this structure again and again until you arrive at the end of your piece, each time advancing your narrative one step further.

## 6. Wrap It Up

Think of the ending to a journey article as you would that of a destination article. There are, in fact, all sorts of ways you can bring your story to a close. You could take your reader back to an earlier scene from your story, return to a theme you've discussed, or even close with a final bit of information about the destination you've been exploring.

But whatever you do... bring it to a close quickly. Again... show restraint. Don't wax on about how the trip changed your life. Don't spend four paragraphs describing the sunset you enjoyed on your last night there. Instead, find a way to draw your reader back around to the front of your story — or make a quick statement that summarizes your experience.

Let's look at the way our three journey-article writers close their pieces.

David Goodman uses his last long paragraph to run his readers through what they did in inland Belize... and then quickly reminds them of where his story started:

"I started the next day at 6:30 a.m. with a two-hour bird-watching walk on which I spotted brilliantly colored quetzals and toucans high in the rainforest canopy. The rest of the family hung out in bed until breakfast, after which we all hiked to the site of the butterfly research program. Ariel watched in amazement as an iridescent blue morpho butterfly emerged from its pupa and flew off. We also hiked on the rainforest medicine trail, went mountain biking, took a sunset canoe trip with a Belizean naturalist, explored Mayan ruins on horseback and foot, and floated on an inner tube into a 12-mile-long cave.

"But it was the sharks that — excuse the phrase — left the deepest impression on my daughter."

Marybeth Bond sums up her Ireland trip this way:

"There are all kinds of adventures. Biking through a land of hills and mist pushed me physically, but my real discovery was cultural: The sun in the Irish soul is expressed through song, and the smile in Irish eyes is contagious."

And Kenneth Brower returns to the anthropology theme he's touched on throughout his article, finishing with a scene from his trip and a statement about what it means:

"Simon and the village men, fledged in the feathers of whistling kites, sent us off with a dance. Our photographer, Bob Krist, received permission to join the circle with his camera. Bending his knees for upward angles, he began unconsciously to dip in time with the music. Hearing titters of appreciation, he began to dance in earnest, still snapping pictures. He made an outlandish figure, a large, bearded, bear-like man in a photo vest of many pockets, hopelessly anomalous in this swirl of small, black, befeathered people. And yet he somehow fit. He was right on the beat. He bobbed his way through the dancers, peering about like a good-natured Cyclops through the single eye of the camera. Everyone roared with laughter: dancers and audience, children and elders, blacks and whites. In the village of Red Soil, while the dance lasted, all humanity really was one."





## Don't Forget the Invisible Glue You Need a Central Idea... a Theme, an Opinion, a Promise

There is one more thing that separates a great journey article from a merely ho-hum one: A truly successful journey article has at its core one central idea — a theme. If your article does not have one, you'll find your writing wandering from scene to scene with nothing to unify the narrative. You can go through all the steps you now know to go through... but if the story you're telling has nothing to hold it together but a chronological timetable... your reader won't likely stick with you.

The invisible glue that holds a journey article together through the cycle of scene-context-scene is a theme, a central idea, an opinion you proffer early and then return to again and again. It's the "promise," essentially.

In the first piece we looked at here, for example, the one about the family vacation to Belize, the writer says early on: "Belize is full of such counter-intuitive little wonders. My wife, Sue, and I were lured there largely because of the beach-and-jungle adventure opportunities packed into a country the size of Vermont." And throughout the article, he returns to this idea — in the choice of examples he gives about what they do in Belize, in the choice of scenes he sets, in the choice of anecdotes. As a result, the whole article ends up supporting what has become a central idea — that there are many different kinds of adventures to be had here.

In the second article we examined, as well, the writer sets forth a theme early on and sticks to it. Marybeth Bond says about her Ireland adventure: "...an organized bike trip didn't fit my loose schedule or my slim budget. ...For me, the advantage of exploring rural Ireland by bicycle was the slow pace. I could stop often, breathe the fragrant air, absorb the verdant landscape..." And so she does. The story she tells is all about what she discovered out there on her own. It's a testament to this kind of travel.

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**You can go through all the steps you now know to go through... but if the story you're telling has nothing to hold it together but a chronological timetable... your reader won't likely stick with you.**

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In the third example we looked at, too, there is a theme set forth within the first few paragraphs. Kenneth Brower consistently draws comparisons between the modern world and the primitive cultures of New Guinea, between the tour members and the locals.

He says, “This would not be the last moment of culture shock as we 12 Americans (plus one Briton) continued our tour up the Sepik River...” and “While the anthropologists observe, they are being observed. As Information Age met Stone Age on the Sepik, I was keeping my eyes peeled in both directions.”

Somewhere in the mid-section of the article, he writes, “The two shook hands with gusto — a striking pair, the commissioner pale-skinned, nearly a head taller, and no makeup; the witch doctor dark and short and painted like a Picasso. ‘What remarkable biodiversity we have within the human race,’ I thought.” And then, as we just saw, he returns to this idea again at the very end of his article, saying that at least on one level, at one time, everyone was one.

## **SPECIAL FOCUS ON FIRST PERSON**

### **How to Keep a Reader Engaged When You’re Telling Your Story Using “I” or “we”**

I’ve said this already, I realize: When you’re writing about YOUR trip, from YOUR point of view, you must be vigilant in making sure that you don’t spend too much time bothering your reader, distracting him from your story.

But it’s such an important idea, I want to spend some more time focusing on it.

Showing a reader that you were there makes sense... it gives you some authority in the reader’s eye. After all, you can speak from first-hand experience. That’s good.

### **When You Use “I” or “We” Too Often...**

But when you use “I” or “we” too often, it’s as if you step out front-and-center on the page and wave your arms around frantically in front of the copy so your reader has to crane around you to keep reading. The reader will find it annoying.

Your story should be about the destination or the journey... not about you.

Here's another way to think about it:

Imagine yourself as a real estate broker showing a house.

While you'd certainly want to call a potential buyer's attention to the view through the front window or to the brand new appliances in the kitchen...you wouldn't walk backwards 1.5 feet in front of him into every room in the house and keep insisting he talk to you.

You'd let the house show itself. You might trail along at a respectful distance and suggest he take a look at how big the closets are or tell him to pop his head into the attic — it would make a perfect boy's room. You'd stay out of the way and let the house — cast in the positive light you'd throw — sell itself.

Now do that when you write.

Allow your reader to appreciate a place as you see it. But don't stand in front of him, block his view, and then simply tell him what it is you see.

### **Example 1: Too Many “We’s” Calls Too Much Attention to the Authors**

In this selection, too much “we” means the reader doesn't see the place — he sees the writers in the place.

*“First, lets be honest. We are not Bed and Breakfast people. We like fancy hotels with lots of service. We’ve stayed at Bed and Breakfasts on occasion and felt crowded and uncomfortable.*

*“But our stay at Murphin’s Ridge Inn has changed our opinion of the Bed and Breakfast experience. This extraordinary inn is surrounded by 140 acres of beautiful country, not far from the Amish community in the area. No matter what the season, the Inn is awash with color. It offers a cozy stopping place in beautiful, natural surroundings.*

*“It was at Murphin’s Inn that we explored wooded trails with a picnic lunch prepared by the inn’s chef. We also enjoyed a game of tennis on*



the inn's courts and took a swim in the pool. We also visited the Amish community with its wonderful bakery and smelled the aroma of freshly baked pies which we purchased and took back to our inn.

"When the sun went down, we had dinner in the 1820's farm Farm House where an outstanding chef prepared fresh, regional cuisine. After dinner, we strolled back to the Guest House to read and chat with other guests in the Great Room.

"We stayed in the new Woodland cabins on the edge of the woods. We could hear the birds chirping and the crickets. It was like being in another era, away from the hustle and bustle of city life. The cabin had a three-sided fireplace, wet bar and mini-fridge. There was also a two-person whirlpool and showers. We felt like we were on a honeymoon at this lovely cabin in the woods."

## **Example 2: Fewer "We's" Brings the Focus Back to the Place**

This revised version is better. The authors still tell the story... but they get out of the way so the reader can see what they're talking about.

"We are not Bed-and-Breakfast people — to us, they've always felt crowded and uncomfortable. We like fancy hotels with lots of service.

"But our stay at Murphin's Ridge Inn has changed our opinion of the Bed-and-Breakfast experience. This extraordinary inn, surrounded by 140 acres of beautiful country, is awash in color year-round and offers a cozy stopping place in beautiful, natural surroundings.

"With the Inn as your home base, you can explore wooded trails (the Inn's chef will provide a picnic lunch), enjoy a game of tennis, or take a swim in the pool. In the nearby Amish community is a wonderful bakery that sells fresh-baked pies you can carry back home.

"At sundown, dine at the Inn's Farm House, dating to the 1820's, where an outstanding chef prepares fresh, regional cuisine. We lingered over our meal and then strolled back to the Guest House to read and chat with other guests in the Great Room.

"Staying in the new Woodland cabins on the edge of the woods — where you'll hear the sounds of birds singing and crickets chirping

— will transport you to another era, away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Our cabin had a three-sided fireplace, wet bar, mini-fridge, a two-person whirlpool, and showers. It would make an ideal honeymoon retreat.”

**TOP  
SECRET**

## Four Ways to Get Out of the Way While You Tell Your Story...

**1. Avoid recounting your every thought and reaction.** (You still make judgments and offer opinions. But let them stand on their own... give them their own authority.)

*Instead of:* “I thought the rich chocolate cake made the perfect companion for the dark, unsweetened coffee this back-alley cafe serves.”

*Say:* “The rich chocolate cake made the perfect companion for the dark, unsweetened coffee this back-alley cafe serves.”

*Instead of:* “My hour-long massage... the careful manicure... the plates piled high with strawberries, kiwis slices, peeled oranges... the aroma-therapy facial... it all made me feel like royalty. A day of queen-like pampering, yet I paid just \$40.”

*Say:* “The hour-long massage... the careful manicure... the plates piled high with strawberries, kiwis slices, peeled oranges... the aroma-therapy facial... was fit for royalty. A day of queen-like pampering for just \$40.”

**2. Go easy on “me” phrases.**

*Instead of:* “The shop owner told me she’d sold more ‘faux-antique’ paintings in the last month than she’s sold over the last four years.”

*Say:* The shop owner said she’d sold more ‘faux-antique’ paintings in the last month than she’s sold over the last four years.”

*Instead of:* “It seemed to me that this would make the perfect single-parent getaway.”

*Say:* “This would make the perfect single-parent getaway.”

**3. Try not to use “I,” “me,” “we,” or “us” more than once or twice per paragraph.** (This is by no means a rule set in stone... but if you use it as a guideline, you’ll force yourself to cut back to such an extent that you’ll naturally get out of the way of your story.)

**4. Turn to “you” when you’re looking for a fix.** (In other words, think about what your reader would want.)

*Instead of:* “We discovered that for just another \$50 per person we could have enjoyed an upgraded room all week, which would have gotten us not just a better view, but also a fresh fruit basket and a nightly cocktail on the house.”

*Say:* “Another \$50 per person buys you an upgraded room all week, which means not just a better view, but also a fresh fruit basket and a nightly cocktail on the house.”

**Now it’s time for your next exercise...**



### **Write a Short Article of 250-600 Words**

As I explained earlier in this chapter, one of the best ways to land your first by-line at publications is to start small. Look at the “departments” or what editors refer to as the “front-of-the-book” pieces. If you’re interested in writing about something outside the United States, you should consider *International Living* as a possible place to have your piece published — the “postcards” published there would fit this format.

Write an article of 250 to 600 words. It can be about anything you like, though you’ll want to keep the scope of your article in check. It’s probably not enough space to write about an entire country, for instance. But you could focus on a restaurant, a shop, an exhibit, a park, a hotel, a tour, an activity unique to a particular place, a festival...

If you’ve worked your way carefully through this program up to this point, you’re prepared to write this well. Don’t let this exercise intimidate you. Think of it as a recommendation you’d send a friend.



1. What do you plan to write about? Get out a pen and jot it down now.
2. Identify the audience you think would be interested in this story. Describe that audience.
3. Do a little research (review Chapter 5 for resources and guidance) to find a publication you think might be interested in your piece. Write the name of that publication. If you think your article would fit into a particular “department,” or section, write that down, too.
4. I’d like to suggest you consider one of three publications where, as an AWAI member, you have an “in.” The editors at these three publications know about this travel writing program and like it. They’ve published work produced by folks taking it and are happy to do so again.



While I cannot guarantee you a by-line in one of these publications, I can assure you a bump to the “top of the pile” so to speak. And hey, in this business, you’re wise to take advantage of any preferential treatment you can get.

That said, here are three places I encourage you to examine as possible outlets for the article you’re about to sit down and write:

### ***International Living***

([www.internationalliving.com](http://www.internationalliving.com))

You’ll find the Writer’s Guidelines at the “Write for Us” button at the very bottom of the home page.

### ***Travel Post Monthly***

([www.travelpostmonthly.com](http://www.travelpostmonthly.com))

You’ll find a link to the Writer’s Guidelines on the home page.

### ***The Traveler***

([www.touristtravel.com](http://www.touristtravel.com))

You can get the Writer’s Guidelines by sending an email requesting them to: [guidelines@touristtravel.com](mailto:guidelines@touristtravel.com). Put “guidelines request” in the subject line.

5. Get the Writer's Guidelines for the publication you're going to target and read them carefully. Take a few notes about specifics they're looking for, things you'll want to remember as you write. For example, if the editors want only 400 words, you'll want to make sure your piece doesn't exceed that.
6. Read at least three examples from the publication you're targeting of the sort of piece you're planning to write. To do this, you'll need to either get your hands on a few back issues or read some online at that publication's website. (You don't need to read the entire magazine or newsletter, just some examples of the sort of short piece you're about to write.)

Don't read just as a reader, read as a writer. What I mean is: Pay attention to what the writers have done, and take some notes here or in the margins of the stories. You might ask yourself, for example: What's the "scope" of the subject matter? What's in the lead? What comes next? What sort of practical details does the writer include?

In other words, spend a little time deconstructing these sample articles. You'll learn all sorts of useful things. (You may find you need to revise your own story idea in light of what you learn.)

7. Okay, you're ready to write. Keep that "promise" you're going to make to your reader in mind as you do. You want to be sure that, if that's your main idea, you stick to it. Don't get distracted. Remember two more things as well: 1) You'll want to make an "emotional" appeal to your reader. 2) The best descriptions rely on specifics.



8. You're just about ready to start writing. But first, you need to get one idea straight in your mind: What "promise" are you going to make to your reader? In other words, what's the "big benefit" or theme of your article? Boil it down to one sentence or phrase, and write that here. (For the sake of illustration, I'll remind you of an example we talked about in Chapter 6 — the Charleston, SC antiques articles. If I were to boil that main idea down to one phrase, I'd say: "Where to find high-quality, good-value antiques in Charleston's out-of-the-way shops.")
9. I consider this exercise a "real" assignment — and I hope you will, too. What I mean is: Use this article as your first foray into travel writing. Send

it to the publication you've targeted. But before you do, take some time to polish it. First, read it out loud. Do you find yourself tripping up anywhere? Is there any point where the language isn't as smooth as it could be? If so, rewrite there.

10. Once you're happy with your piece, give it to somebody else — a friend, your spouse, or a writer-buddy — to read. Tell that person who your intended audience is, and ask him or her two questions:

- What do you like best about this? What most caught your attention?
- Is there anything it's missing? Are you left with any questions?

Armed with that feedback, revise again if necessary.

11. Now, confident you've created a piece that's well-targeted to the publication where you aim to have it published, reread the Writer's Guidelines at that publication one last time. Have you done what you're supposed to do?

If so, you'll need to draft a quick cover note to go with your article before you send it to the editor. (You'll find a full discussion of query letters in Chapter 22 of this program, but here, below, is an example of the sort of note you might draft to introduce a short article you have attached.)

If you're sending your piece to one of the three publications I recommended above — *International Living*, *Travel Post Monthly*, or *The Traveler* — then I suggest you include a P.S. like the one I've drafted below. As I explained, the editors at those three publications know and like this travel writing program and are pleased to receive submissions from people who are working their way through it.

Editor's Name

Publication Name

Date

Dear Ms. Editor's Name:

It goes little reported in Mexico — a land of many pilgrimages — the one hundreds (maybe thousands) of women take every year to a small shop on Mesones Street in San Miguel de Allende.

Their quest? Cocktail Combat Sandals — shoes you

can walk miles in on cobblestone streets and then pair with your little black number at night. If you travel, you're crazy to go on the road anywhere in the world without them.

You'll find attached my 300-word article, "Cocktail Combat Shoes: Travel Necessities Sewn and Sold in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico."

These days, you can also buy these shoes online and in select stores stateside. I explain where and how in my article and talk, too, about the Mexican couple who created these travel necessities and who, today, still cobble and sell them in San Miguel.

Sincerely,

Writer's Name

name@emailaddress.com  
12345 South Main Street  
Anywhere, PA 12345 USA  
(111) 222-3333 phone

P.S. I am taking AWAI's travel writing program.  
Thank you for your consideration.

**Note:** As I've said, I cannot guarantee you'll land a by-line with your article. But I can say — with certainty — that if you've followed to the letter the step-by-step advice and guidance included in this program thus far, you're already well ahead of much of your competition.

We regularly hear from writers just like you who come to this point in the program, take a deep breath, submit to an editor what they've written for this exercise, get it published, and get paid, too.

So don't sit there thinking, "Oh, this isn't good enough." Or "I just don't think I'm cut out for this." Get your piece into an editor's hands. It's the only way you'll ever get it published! Go on... send it in...

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