

7 tips for travel bloggers

By Eugene Yiga

The past few years have seen a surge of travel bloggers. This has led to a growing number of people who want to join the ranks of these professionals, whether full-time or just on the side. But how do you turn your love for travelling into a career? Here are seven tips for travel bloggers.

1. Know your audience

As much as it's valuable to have a large audience, this isn't enough when it comes to digital marketing. What you need is an audience who will resonate with your content.

"We're looking for engagement and not just reach," says Velma Corcoran, Executive Marketing Manager for Cape Town Tourism. "We want access to their audience and their influence."

But this audience doesn't have to be all yours, nor do you have to be in the same location as your audience. Your focus should be on understanding the nature of your audience and generating content that others will share over and over again. And as long as your extended audience is in the right place, you can be anywhere in the world.

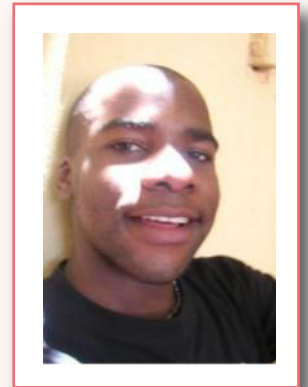
"The 'true base' is when people's bases start sharing with their bases, and their base's bases, and so on," says Michael Bean, Managing Director of BrandsEye, an online monitoring and insights tool that tracks online conversations. "You've got to understand the audience you could reach if their network starts to share."

2. Do your homework

Before you approach a tourism board or destination marketing organisation and offer to be a travel blogger, get your act together. First, come up with a standardised way of presenting your stats (followers, subscribers, and so on). Then, do some research on the destination.

"Get to know the client and come up with an idea that will help the destination achieve their objectives," says Keith Jenkins, CEO of travel blogger network iambassador and a creator of the Velvet Escape travel blog. "What is this destination about? What are their themes for this year? Do they have any marketing campaigns coming out? What can you do as a blogger to help them achieve their objectives, in marketing a certain theme or helping them with a certain campaign that they have planned?"

After studying financial accounting and classical piano, **Eugene Yiga** made the rational switch to a career in branding, communications, and market research. But writing was always his calling, which is why he quit his cosy job, freelanced until he was broke, and now works as a Cape Town-based lifestyle and entertainment journalist for the online and print publications that respond to his emails. Get in touch at www.eugeneyiga.com.



Once you've answered these questions, you need to create a clear and concise pitch. This will outline exactly what you plan to offer.

"Speaking from experience as a destination marketing organisation or working with clients, whether they're small or big, they have a million and one things going on," says Mariette du Toit-Helmbold, CEO of Destinate, a tourism marketing agency. "So when you come with a pitch, make sure we can get excited about reading it and that it concisely includes all the required information."

3. Be a professional

Pitching well is one of the ways to show that you're a professional. It also saves the tourism board or destination marketing organisation from doing the work. That means you should never tell them to just 'Google you' to find out your Facebook and Twitter stats.

"You are a brand," says Du Toit-Helmbold. "Invest in that brand. Take some time and effort to put your content and your profile together."

Another part of being professional is to make sure you offer value. The worst bloggers are those who say, "Give me something for free and I'll write about you." The best are those who make the exchange worthwhile.

"People are always happy to pay for a service," says Simon Lewis, co-founder of the African Bloggers Network and

owner of Travel Concept Solution, a specialised marketingservices agency for the travel industry. “Try to do it as a trade exchange if they don’t have a budget. Tell them you want to help them market their product via your network of followers and influencers. That’s a more professional way to approach it.”

4. Show your value

Once you become more professional in your work, it’s possible that you can start getting paid. In fact, if your content is good enough, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t make money.

“There are so many different ways in which bloggers can earn an income and become professional in this new career,” says Jenkins. “The main thing is that you have to let them know. Don’t just say, ‘I’m here for ten days so pay me my day rate’ because that’s not going to get you very far.”

The key is to show your value. Make it clear that you’re one of the few people who will produce the best content. And the more multimedia your content (photos, videos, text, and so on), the better your offering will be.

“I think bloggers become content generators,” says Corcoran. “At the end of the day, if you come to me with good ideas of what you’re going to do and what you’re going to be producing, then I’m happy to pay for it. We want to work with people who are good at what they do.”

5. Create content that lasts

Besides creating content that can work across several different platforms, you have to create content that can work across time.

“Bloggers are professional publicists,” says Du Toit-Helmbold. “They share content. It’s about creating content that can last. Working with bloggers, we make sure we contract in terms of content that we want to have generated over an extended period.”

6. Generate trust

As much as it might be great to feel success from your work as a travel blogger, don’t go overboard.

“My criticism of a lot of blogging campaigns is when you have a whole lot of bloggers in one destination in a short week and they are going crazy about a certain hashtag,” says Corcoran. “And then the next week you see them in a different destination. It starts to lose credibility.”

You can overcome this by generating trust with your audience. Readers get hooked onto a particular blogger for a reason. And once you generate trust, you can start influencing decision-making.

“Interact with your followers by asking questions and giving tips,” says Jenkins. “This, in my experience, is the most powerful way in creating buzz around a destination. It’s immediate and you get a lot of interaction from people who are interested.”

7. Stay true to your readers

Generating trust with your audience also means that you must keep their interests in mind above all else. That means always being sincere and honest in your thoughts.

“We get a dozen requests from bloggers every week,” says Corcoran. “We need to work with them in a way that their voice remains credible.”

Of course there will always be opportunists and unprofessional bloggers who want to take advantage of their influence. But if you are a blogger who is serious about your audience, do not sell out.

“People are smart,” says Corcoran. “If one person is saying something is amazing and everyone else is saying it’s not that great, people are going to sniff through it. Ultimately, you’ll lose credibility with your audience. The audience, at the end of the day, will be the judge of that.”

So don’t be afraid to write from the heart. After all, if you are only writing what the destination or brand wants you to write, they might as well do it themselves because they can do it better.

“Do not underestimate your audience,” says Jenkins. “As a blogger you need to create content that comes from within. It has to be based on your passion. That passion should shine through in your content.”

To network with other travel bloggers near you, go to www.travelmassive.com. To meet tourism boards and potential partners, register at www.wtmlondon.com to attend World Travel Market in London from 2 to 5 November.

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