

Travel Writing:

A Journal of the Five Senses

Try to catch the feelings - the sound, the smell, the tang, of a place - immediately, before it goes. A place is like a dream, and unless you record it instantly, however tired you feel at the time, it will fade and fade, and you will never be able to recapture it. - **Pico Iyer**

Text by **Kate Orson**





"Out of the taxi I see swarms of motorbikes carrying whole families, furniture, panes of glass. I try the handle to shut the car window, but it's broken, no airconned cocoon for me, I am welcomed into the city, by honking horns, and petrol fumes mingling with the scent of a jasmine wreath that hangs from the driver's dashboard, as if it is a talisman, to protect us from the polluted air."

Readng is a journey. A book can take me to the arctic, while I'm swinging in a hammock on a tropical island, or be my escape route from a city skyscraper, into the depths of the jungle. A writer recreates sensory experiences, so the reader leaves their everyday surroundings, and enters into the story.

When we've lived in a place a long time, we become habituated to it, the same old walk to work every morning no longer holds our attention.

Traveling is a wake-up call to the senses, bombarding us with new sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. Maybe that's why travel and writing naturally go together.

We are all travel writers. We send emails to friends to capture the places we visit and the people we meet. We write 'wish you were here,' on postcards and our words are the vehicle to take them there. When we get back home, we entertain our friends with tales of getting lost, or eating unusual delicacies, trying to communicate the difference between here and there, the distant places that have somehow become a part of us.

If friends are captivated by your tales you may have thought about becoming a travel writer. According to teacher Pat Schneider, we are all writers just as we are all talkers; to become a good writer means to discover your own unique voice.

Next time you go travelling bring a notebook, so you can write down your impressions before the memories fade. There's no need to record everything that happens to you. Just write the moments that demand the attention of your senses.

When you get back home you can transform your jumble of sensory impressions, into complete pieces of writing, perhaps articles for magazines, or if you've been on the road for a long time; a book.

Rewrite your experiences, filling in the gaps, so that your journey, has a sense of time and place, but without the boring bits. Describe the people you met and your travel companions so they jump out of the page like real people.

Hone your descriptions so your words whisk us out of the real world for a while. If you wrote 'the Italian ice cream was delicious,' go back into your memory and dig a little deeper. How exactly did that Italian ice cream taste? Describe it so your reader's mouth waters!

Edit any clichés you wrote in a hurry, such as 'the island is like heaven on earth,' or 'the mountains are breathtaking.' Tells us exactly what the mountains or the islands look like so we can picture them in our mind.

Editing is one of the hardest parts of the writing process, but it's also the most satisfying. As you reread your work for a final time you will discover that your travels have not faded like a distant memory, but are there translated onto the page. That's when you know it's time to send your writing off on it's own journey, and see where it ends up.

Further Reading : Lonely Planet, Travel Writing - Expert advice on travel writing from the best writers and editors in the business, By Don George, with Charlotte Hindle. ■