

The 9 Elements Missing from the Conventional Travel Story

1. A personal voice

So many travel stories sound the same. If you write honestly about your reactions to a place – what about it surprised you, amused you, depressed you, intrigued you, moved you? – you will inject a personal voice into your story and in so doing make it stand out.

2. A point of view

There is often nothing negative in the conventional travel story, and this bland rosiness, by ignoring the realities, not only makes for dull reading, it does a disservice to both the subject and the readers.

3. A sense of the present

The traditional travel story focuses on the history of a place – the monuments, the museums. The challenge and thrill of travel writing is discovering what is happening now.

4. Imagination

Travel writers are sometimes accused of making things up; the best save their creativity for language that – through the use of similes, metaphors, allusions – brings a true experience to life.

5. Insight

The conventional travel story skims the surface. Now that almost every place has been photographed, the best travel writing goes beyond the descriptive into the analytical.

6. Continuity

A good travel story is more than just a collection of random impressions; it has a theme. Decide at the beginning what point you want to get across about the place and then work your story around it.

7. Humor

Travel – the displacement from the familiar to the foreign – is inherently funny, but most travel stories are devoid of laughs.

8. Conversation

The inclusion of dialogue, or even long passages of recorded speech, gives a travel story some of the qualities of a short story while making it both personal and topical.

9. People

It is difficult to write knowledgeably, or movingly, about a place unless you have made contact with at least one local. Unlike the sights, the people you meet give your journey its uniqueness; they give you insight into the everyday life of the place; and – if you're lucky – they give you an emotional connection.