

Magazine Journalism

A vibrant illustration of a beach scene. On the left, a palm tree with green fronds stands on a sandy shore. In the foreground, a large beach umbrella with blue and yellow stripes is open, and a smaller, colorful beach ball sits on the sand nearby. The background features a clear blue sky with a few white, fluffy clouds. The overall scene is bright and cheerful, representing a vacation or travel theme.

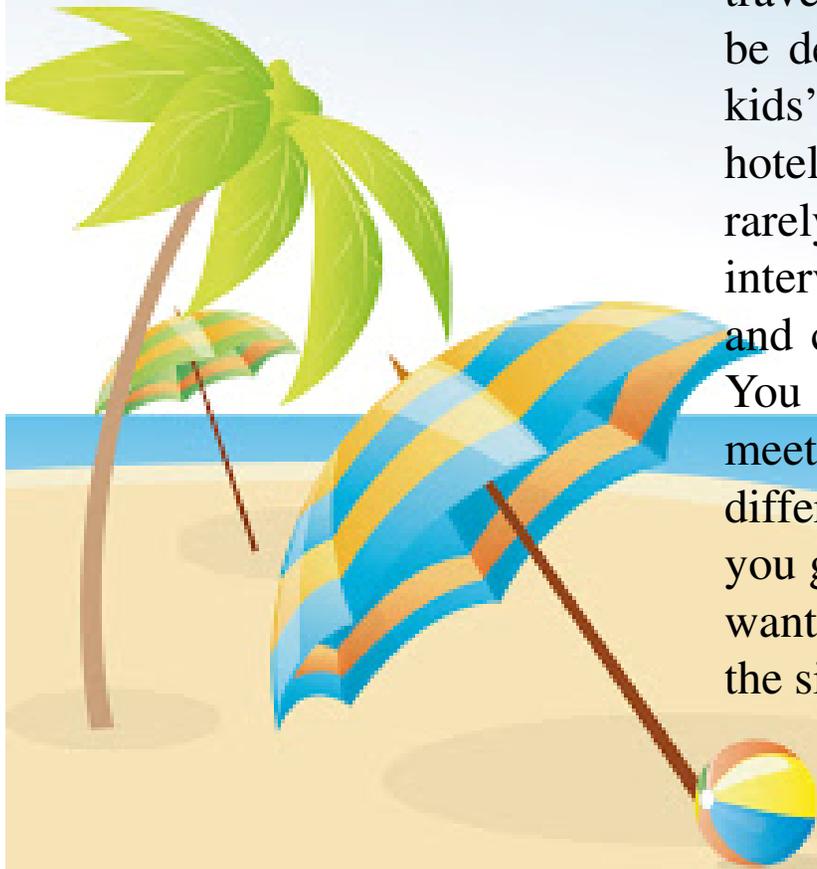
Topic – Travel Writing

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Travel Writing

The Goa resort surpasses every travel fantasy, from the white-sand beach to the gargantuan pool, luxurious marble bathrooms, and dotting staff. Too bad while everyone else is reveling in paradise, you're racing around with a notebook, asking questions, and scribbling furiously.

You're hot, tired, and cranky. Welcome to the world of travel writing. You're interviewing a chef when you could be deep into a new mystery at the beach, inspecting the kids' club when you'd rather be playing tennis, or touring hotels when the rest of your family is snorkeling. You rarely daydream by the pool or anywhere else. You interview other pool-goers, skiers waiting in the lift lines, and cruisers filling their plates at lunch. The good news: You get to go places other people only dream about and meet amazing people. You come home with an entirely different perspective than the average tourist. Even better, you get paid for the privilege. You don't have to begin life wanting to be a travel writer to become one now. Follow the six tips below and you'll be on your way.





1. Start at home. Approach your local newspaper/magazine or company newsletter with a story based on a recent trip or one you're planning. Or, query editors elsewhere about a story in your own backyard, whether it's the new restaurant scene in your city, or the favorite shopping haunts around Jaipur/ Mumbai/ Delhi. You can find the names of—and often the e-mail addresses for—feature and travel editors listed on newspaper and magazine Web sites.

2. Do your homework.

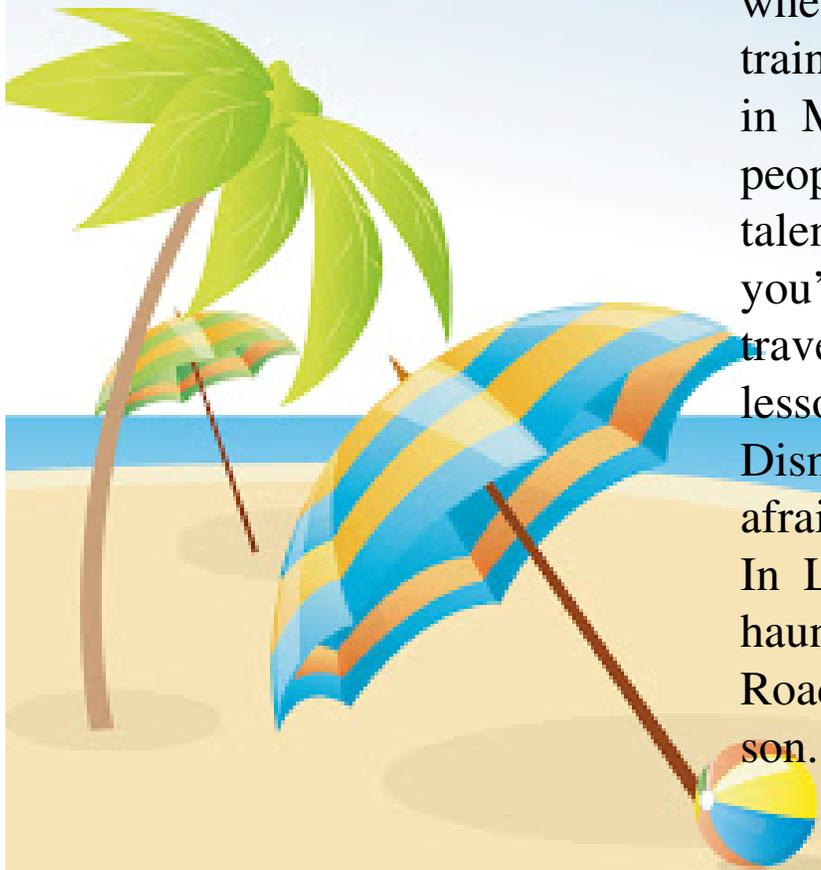
Before pitching your story, research the information you need to sell your idea to an editor. Are more people river rafting with kids these days? Is Italy a new hot destination? Are women opting for ski camps? Are men hitting spas? Most state, regional, or city visitor and convention bureaus have staff assigned to answer reporters' questions. You also can tap sources at resorts, hotel chains, cruise lines, adventure outfitters, and even the National Park Service. Check out the Travel Industry, which tracks trends, for support for your pitch or to come up with ideas.

Another important part of your homework is understanding what each magazine needs. Travel writer and novelist Shirley Streshinsky said, "Do not, as I once did, suggest a story on Bali to a travel magazine that runs stories exclusively on Europe. And if stories in a given magazine tend to run to 1,500 words, do not turn in a 4,000-word manuscript."



3. Find your niche.

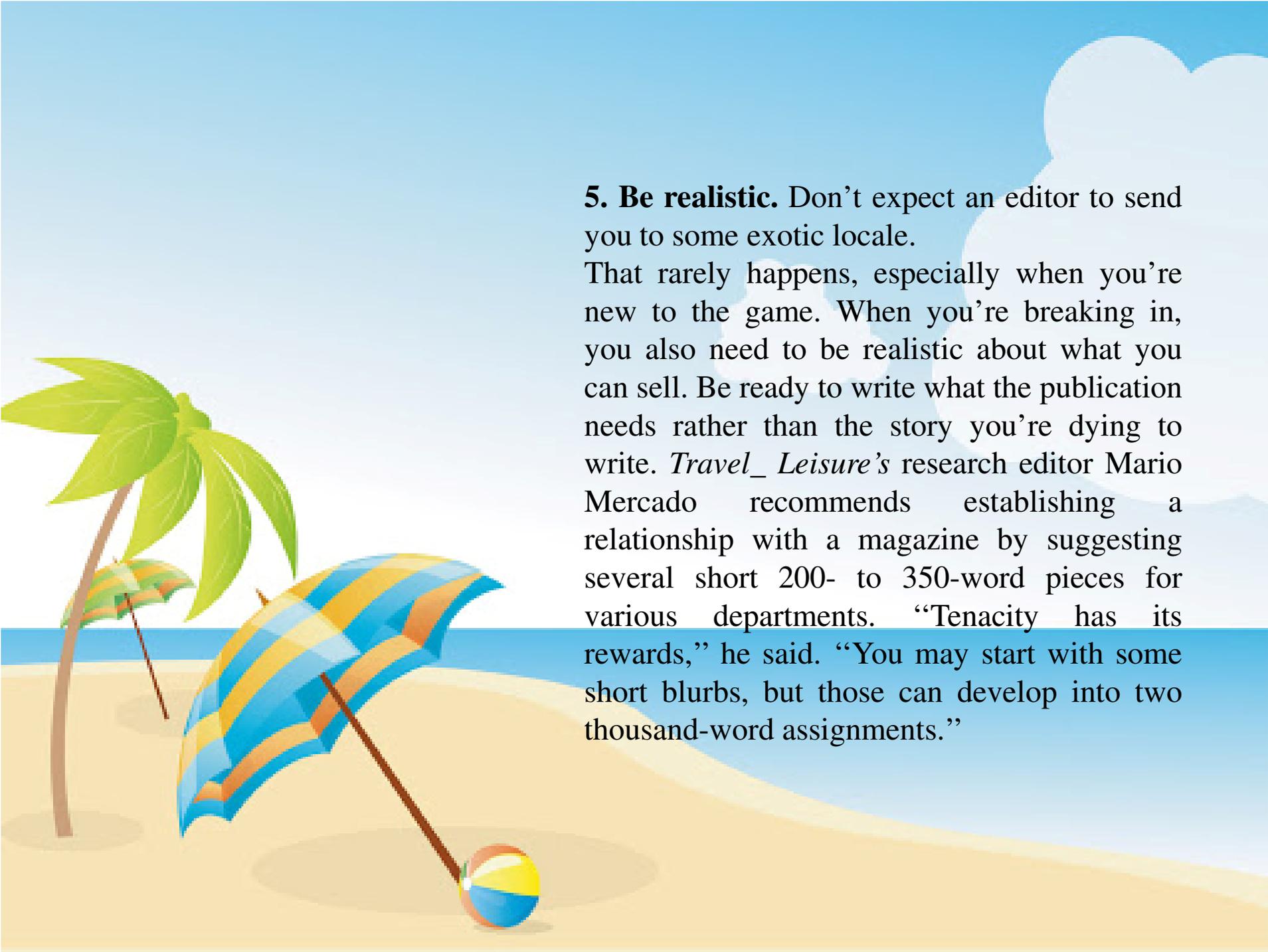
It always helps if you've got some expertise on the subject. You could specialize in family travel, snow sports, spas, food or cycling, senior or gay travel. Build on your expertise (or develop one) based on your interests. If you're a gourmet cook, consider writing about new chefs; if you're a golfer, explore golf resorts. Reporting, you'll find, can be a terrific way to learn, whether it's learning about the history of Rakhigarhi, training sled dogs in hilly areas, or hand-painting pottery in Madhubani, Bihar. You'll be amazed at how much people will help you, too, sharing their perspectives, talents, and even secrets known only to the locals. Once you've got your niche, you can explore new angles to travel venues that have inspired reams of copy. Take a lesson from freelance travel writer Eileen Ogintz. In Walt Disney World, she wrote about standing in line and being afraid of roller coasters, not just about the newest rides. In London, rather than writing about the usual tourist haunts, she wrote about exploring London's Portobello Road antique (and junk) markets with her eight-year-old son.



4. Be honest.

When pitching an editor, be clear about whether you accepted any press discounts for the trip about which you're writing. Some publications won't want your story if you do, while others won't care. Chances are, though, you won't be afforded any great discounts or invited on press-only trips unless you've got an assignment letter from some publication or have published several pieces. Even then, you may not be offered a great deal. But the more travel stories you've done, the more likely you'll get invited along on junkets designed to introduce travel writers to new places, hotels, and cruise ships. But these organized trips aren't the only way to approach travel writing. Sometimes a more realistic view of each place, exchanging views with locals and other tourists, is better. And when you travel on your own, you're also not tethered to a group itinerary—and agenda.





5. Be realistic. Don't expect an editor to send you to some exotic locale.

That rarely happens, especially when you're new to the game. When you're breaking in, you also need to be realistic about what you can sell. Be ready to write what the publication needs rather than the story you're dying to write. *Travel_Leisure's* research editor Mario Mercado recommends establishing a relationship with a magazine by suggesting several short 200- to 350-word pieces for various departments. "Tenacity has its rewards," he said. "You may start with some short blurbs, but those can develop into two thousand-word assignments."



6. Keep pitching. You may pitch dozens of ideas—good ones, you think—that editors don't like. An editor may tell you an idea is overdone. Other editors may like the idea but want to use a writer they know. It's important to realize that rejection often has little to do with your ability or ideas. Perhaps the newspaper you approach about your Alaskan cruise has just published an entire section on the subject. Maybe the magazine you thought would love your story about your bike trip in Ladakh just printed a piece about a bike trip along the Great Himalays. If one editor turns you down, try another at a different publication. Ask the editors for suggestions. Mercado said he often refers writers to other editors at his magazine or elsewhere. The more clips you have to show—even if you've only published travel stories in your local weekly—the better your chances. The clips not only show that you're serious but that you've been successful.