

*There's no place like*

# HOME

*By Kerrie Flanagan*

**NO ONE KNOWS AN AREA BETTER THAN LOCALS. SO WHY AREN'T YOU PITCHING TRAVEL ARTICLES ABOUT YOUR STATE?**

You don't have to trek to faraway places like Morocco or Iceland to find great travel stories. Stop and look around: There are plenty of fun and interesting things to do in your own state. Become an expert on where you live and start pitching the unique events, places, and people from your area to magazine editors.

## FINDING IDEAS TO PITCH

Start by thinking like a tourist visiting your state. What are the places visitors like to see and explore in your region? What is your area known for? Maybe there are great orchards or unique festivals or historical monuments. Make a list of all those places and sites; write down as many as you can think of. As a resident, what deeper insight do you have about these areas? Think about the history, the people, or interesting facts. Then break those bigger concepts into smaller, more detailed ones that readers will find intriguing.

Kristin Luna, a Tennessee-based writer who covers travel, food, entertainment, and lifestyle, finds ideas through old acquaintances or everyday life. “Some of my favorite childhood haunts and state parks have, 30 years later, become the sources of many of my travel pieces. Others are generated by things I see my friends write about on Facebook (like, most recently, a pair of men in my hometown who couldn’t find an after-dinner date spot to take their wives for dessert, so they created their own artisan ice cream scoop shop).” She suggests paying attention to your surroundings and the people you encounter every day.

## DETERMINING THE PERFECT ANGLE

I live in Colorado, and when I mention this to people, they immediately think of the mountains, skiing, and the outdoors. These can be interesting topics, but these have all been done before...extensively. That doesn’t mean I can’t write about these ideas, but before I do that, I need to research to see what articles have been written recently and create new slants on the same topics.

Once you settle on some ideas, there are two ways to approach pitching. You can narrow down an idea and then find a magazine that is a good fit, or you could find an interesting publication and create travel ideas specifically geared for that magazine.

Melanie Bowden Simón, author of the 2016 best-seller *La Americana: A Memoir* and a freelance writer and editor based in Savannah, Georgia, notes that doing your homework up front is imperative. “Dig into the submissions guidelines and read what the editors are looking for and then root around within the publication to see what stories

haven’t been told. You want to offer something fresh. The location doesn’t have to be new, but the angle should be: Budapest has loads of copy on it, but probably not the vineyard and wine round-about 30 miles outside of town, on the other side of a Hansel-and-Gretel hotel and at the end of a dirt road.”

## CRAFTING THE PITCH

When it comes time to pen your query letter, think about the timeliness of the topic. It’s best if your idea comes with a “why now?” factor: Does it coincide with an anniversary date? A holiday? Events happening in the world? If possible, give the editor something to hang the idea on. Keep in mind the lead time for the publication. This refers to how far in advance they are working on an issue. Some work four to six months out, and for others, especially online markets, it may only be a month.

Think about the type of article you want to write. It can be a personal narrative that takes the reader on the trip with you or an informational piece about the area. Eileen Cotter Wright, a freelance travel writer and owner of Pure Wander, a group travel hub, suggests writing itineraries that readers can then experience on their own. “Map out public transport, offer hidden deals, describe funky tours, and make the novice feel like a pro before they even land,” she says. “All the Type A travelers will thank you.”

Simón says, “In my experience, editors often like travel round-ups, especially for online outlets: ‘The 10 Best Boutique Hotels in the Southeast,’ ‘The 20 Most Instagrammed Beaches in Europe,’ ‘Hottest New Hotels in the Americas,’ etc.”

The query is your place to showcase your writing to the editor, and the tone of the query should reflect the tone you plan to use for your article. If you are pitching a humorous piece on 10 things to do in Las Vegas when you don’t want to gamble,

then your query shouldn’t be dry and flat. If you are writing a descriptive personal essay about your experience in the beautiful Tongass National Forest in Alaska, then include vivid imagery about the lush foliage and the quiet that surrounds you as you walk on the wooden pathway.

## REACHING OUT TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

One of the best resources for travel is a local or statewide convention and visitors bureau (CVB). They offer a wealth of knowledge and can provide you with unique information about your area. A CVB focuses on tourism, meetings, conventions, and events in an area. Their goal is to bring visitors, who, in turn, shop in the local stores, eat at the restaurants, visit the attractions, and stay in the hotels. This helps to keep the local economy strong. Because of this, CVBs enjoy working with travel writers who plan to give their city coverage in print or online.

Not long ago, I pitched an article to a local high-end magazine. The idea centered around featuring 25 unusual things to see and do in my city where I have been a resident for 30-plus years. This magazine was geared toward locals, so I knew I would have to do some digging to find unique places and events. I set up a meeting with the CVB, and the woman I spoke with shared fantastic information about sites and activities I hadn’t heard of before. I ended up learning a lot that I could pass on to readers.

Cynthia Eichler, president and CEO of Visit Fort Collins in Colorado, encourages travel writers to contact her office or other CVBs. “When journalists reach out, we first want a clear understanding of their needs: What are they writing about, do they want information only, and are they planning to travel to our destination?” She and her staff are also interested to know if you have an assignment or are looking for new ideas to pitch, or if you are working with a specific

magazine or you’re on staff for a publication. Let the CVB know if you want someone to spend time with you or if you plan to venture out on your own, and if you need photography resources. Eichler recommends reaching out to a CVB first with an email introduction and potential questions and needs. If a phone call is desired, note that, too, and let the CVB know of any timelines involved.

## GATHERING INFO

Regardless of the type of travel article or the destination you are writing about, remember to weave in as many of the five senses that you can. Entice the reader to experience the location you are sharing about. Also, think beyond the physical characteristics of a given place. Los Angeles freelance writer Beth Graham shares, “It’s often the people we meet on our travels who make our experiences memorable. Featuring people, rather than just destinations and activities, is a widely underutilized topic among travel writers.”

Details and information about a place can be found online, but for more in-depth insight, don’t be afraid to reach out and talk to people who are enjoying the places you are writing about or set up interviews with people who own or work at that establishment. “If you know that a hotel has been family-owned since 1923, ask the owner about his/her grandfather who started the business. Questions about the art on the walls or who inspired the fusion menu will bring depth and personal anecdotes that breathe life into a story,” Simón suggests.

Writing travel articles about the state you live in allows you to stay close to home while learning more about your region. It gives you the opportunity to be a tourist in your own area, explore places you may never have experienced before, or delve deeper into those you frequent often. So put your adventure hat on and discover the wonders right outside your front door. 📍

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