

Barefoot Writers Come From All Walks Of Life ...

Dream-Job-Turned-Reality: How Mark Andrews Built a Career Out of Globetrotting

Few people can say they're following the first passion they had as kids, let alone that they're doing it while getting to see the world. Mark Andrews is one of those fortunate individuals and shares the story of how he came into the successful world of in-flight writing and where he plans to go from here.

How did you get your start in travel writing?

If you had asked me when I was ten what I wanted to be, I would have told you, "a writer." On the way to adulthood, perhaps that got a bit forgotten, but I never lost that love of writing.

The travel bug hit me when I was 18 after traveling around Australia and Asia for seven-and-a-half months. To get paid to travel was, I thought, a dream job, but it wasn't obvious where to start. Most people recommend you start locally. In 2000, I was living in Tokyo, so I started by contacting a local English-language magazine about doing travel articles for them. This resulted in my first two articles, along with published photographs.

For the first few years, progress was slow, with the

odd article printed here and there. Then in 2005, while I was living in China, things began to take off.



Here's Mark exploring Tokyo. He was accompanied that day by an interpreter courtesy of the Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau

You've found a successful niche for your travel writing. How did that come about?

As a travel writer, I feel people sometimes expect you to know everything — from the species of bird singing its heart out atop a huge tree to that slight hint of a spice in the local specialty you are tasting, while having the language skills of a polyglot. Of course, that's not realistic. You have to narrow down what you write to the things you either know about or that interest you.

My path was made easier by some of Great Escape Publishing's material. I first did the *Ultimate Travel Writer's* program, which helped me break into newspapers. Later, I used the *Breaking into Airline In-Flight Magazines* to enter that market. This now makes up much of my travel writing.

What's on your plate right now?

Right now I'm in Changzhou, China, researching an article for *Inner Circle*, Shangri-la Hotels' online magazine. I'm also trying to sell articles based on some previous trips.

Any tips for easier traveling when planning to work on the road?

It's not always easy to do much work while traveling. One key is to make sure you have some computing solution that is lightweight. A few months ago, I bought a Microsoft Surface to replace my elderly Samsung netbook. I selected it because it has a USB port, meaning it's easy to link my camera, and it can run a full version of Adobe Lightroom. As it is light and compact, it is easy to put in carry-on luggage and to use on the road.

Microsoft OneNote is also useful. I can use it on my smartphone to write ideas as I have them, and then later, see them on my computer.

What unique or out-of-the-box writing work have you taken on?

That's a difficult one. I've written about everything from Japanese houses to Kampot Pepper from Cambodia, plus I don't exclusively do travel writing. One subject I wrote about last year definitely could be considered unusual. For *Silkroad* — the Dragonair inflight magazine — I wrote about people living in caves in the rural area around the city of Xi'an. Over generations, people created these caves out of the loose soil, and the caves varied from pretty basic to quite luxurious. It seems to be a way of life that is probably on its last generation, and the number of families living in such structures has already fallen considerably. I was able to meet some great characters, like 83-year-old Mr. Zhou who had been living in the same cave since he was twelve.

Every writer has his or her own definition of success, from full-time income to more family time to the freedom to enjoy other interests. What's yours? Have you reached it?

In travel writing, there is a kind of hierarchy with the better quality publications paying the most. This is definitely the case with airline magazines, which are near the top of the pile. I have achieved this level, but I would still like to increase my sales.

FACT FILE

Mark Andrews

Previous Job: After university, I taught English as a foreign language and also taught business

Current Writing Interest: I mainly write travel- and car-related articles

Best Part of Barefoot Living: The journey and the stories of the people you meet along the way

Top Advice: Quickly grab the reader's attention or something else will