

GTBC 2013: How to get paid for going on hot air balloon rides



By Ilse van den Berg

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A year on from [GTBC 2012](#) I am honest when I say that I have *still* not started a blog, but hey, you know life. I know what you're thinking... "Excuses, excuses..." And that is exactly what it is. Hi, I'm Ilse and I am a procrastinator. *Crowd gives a clap*

Nevertheless, this year's [GTBC](#) really *really* inspired me with its hands-on workshops and clued-up local speakers. Sharing their expertise was:

- MC and group content director of Ramsay Media, Brandon de Kock who shared some cool insights on creativity;
- Getaway editor, Cameron Ewart-Smith ([@justcam](#)) on how to pitch your writing to an editor;
- Velma Corcoran ([@velbotha](#)) from Cape Town Tourism on digital trends and the travel industry;
- Food and the Fabulous' Ishay Govender ([@foodandthefab](#)) on building a blog identity with integrity;
- African travel activist Meruschka Govender ([@mzansigirl](#)) on the journey of her blog [mzansigirl.com](#);
- Photographer Russell Smith ([@rusmithphoto](#)) on travel photography
- Freelance travel writer/photographer Sarah Duff ([@sarahduff](#)) on travel blog writing;
- Anton Crone ([@antoncrone](#)) from Bright Continent on taking the plunge into travel blogging (and sharing awesomeness of travels in the mountains and Native Americans and having a life changing epiphany);
- Andre van Kets ([@andrevankets](#)) from Discover Africa Group on working with travel companies;
- Retroviral's Mike Sharman ([@MikeSharman](#)) on monetising your blog; and
- Dave Duarte ([@DaveDuarte](#)) from Ogilvy Digital Marketing Academy on rocking your blog

The million dollar question that surfaced as the day proceeded was: "How can I make money off my travel blog so that I can go on hot air balloon rides and write about it?" The answer? Well, first of all, it will require you to create a blog and actually start writing. I know, profound.



Photo by Sarah Duff

Where and how to start?

But, how does one actually start and just exactly what do you write? Duff recommends you:

- scrap the journal and itinerary style of writing.
- don't be generic: lots and lots of travel writing has been done over the years on the web. Find and write about the undiscovered and new.
- write down the cliché words that's been over-used (e.g. nestled, vibrant, boasts, bustling, crystal clear, undiscovered) and *never* use them again.
- say more in less words.
- look at certain types of content that have proven to work well e.g. lists, photo blogs, tips, things to do, food/recipes, stories about people and places.
- remember the difference between a topic (what you are writing about) and an angle (how you write about your topic).
- don't start with what came first on your trip (which goes hand-in-hand with the first point). Rather start with a strong anecdote, a quote or a scene of action.
- describe things as if you are talking to a blind person - making use of all your senses.
- write about the things that guidebooks doesn't cover.

How to succeed

According to Duff, you will need authenticity, quality, consistency, uniqueness and marketing. Some of her points that stood out was:

- Finding your niche first of all: Which type of travelling do you enjoy? e.g. adventure travel, luxury travel, backpacking. Which type of blogs is there a multitude of (e.g. Europe) and which not (e.g. African travels).
- Finding your voice: You won't have *the voice* by your first attempt. This process takes time. Stick to your personality, and please, if you aren't a funny person, don't try to be a comedian in your blog. Your readers will see straight through you and will know that you aren't being authentic.
- You are not being a travel blogger if you write in Lonely Planet style - you are being a boring guide book. People want to *feel* what you experienced, they aren't reading your blog to find out that the Sahara desert is one of largest deserts in the world.
- Have a content strategy: Consistency is key, so plan ahead and start scheduling your content. If you start off by posting content three times a week, then you will have to stick to that. Another good idea is to develop series, categories and themes.

In order to succeed, you will also have to learn how to "rock your blog". Here are my top tips from Duarte on how to be as productive as possible in order to rock your blog:

- rock a ritual
- follow the advice of Kiruba Shankar and be diligent in writing at least 500 words in the morning/evening
- have a theme (e.g. Murad Osmann on [Instagram](#))
- automate things that you can, like scheduling posts and tweets

What determines your blog's success?

In other words, the burning question once again: "When will people start paying me to travel and write?"

Van Kets got right to the point by giving straight-up answers as to what travel companies will look at before commissioning a travel blogger:

- people metrics (Twitter followers, Facebook likes, traffic, age of blog)
- tech metrics (number of pages, number of links, domain authority)
- travel companies care most about ROI so they need to see some benefit out of the deal, if not, you'll simply be dreaming of hot air balloon rides
- According to a survey, this is what travel companies look at when contracting, commissioning or hiring travel bloggers:
 - meeting of deadlines
 - brand objectives
 - portfolio
 - whether they respond well to critique
 - punctuality with emails
 - spelling and grammar
 - a unique voice
 - destination experience
 - active on social media
- quality photos

When looking at your blog, how far would you say are you from getting paid for writing about your hot air balloon rides?

For more, search [#GTBC](#) on Twitter.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work [here](#) and [here](#). Contact Ilse through her website [here](#).

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