MATADOR
CREATORS M COMMUNITY

CONTRIBUTOR GUIDE

Thanks for your interest in Matador. If you'd like to publish with us, please study this contributor guide carefully, and we look forward to seeing your work.

What is Matador Network?

Matador is the web's largest independent travel media site, with over 9 million unique monthly visitors and two million + social followers as of May 2017. From the very beginning, we've focused on the cultural nuances and people-driven stories that mainstream travel media often overlooks. Our editorial has won two Lowell Thomas awards for excellence in travel journalism, and over the past decade we've helped countless creatives progress in their careers as digital storytellers.

The core of Matador's brand is recognizing and celebrating *fearless travel*. We believe travel has the power to change the world, literally, one story, one shared moment, at a time. When all else fails, travel is the one thing that can finally smash preconceptions and prejudices.

WHAT WE PUBLISH

The four main kinds of articles we publish are (1) Trip Planning, (2) Identity, (3) Issues, and (4) Visual.

1. Trip planning

Trip planning content follows one of two formats. The first is a destination-specific guide. These center on recommendations for a particular subject, such as:

- Food-drink / restaurants / cafes, pubs / dive bars / brunches, etc.
- Nightlife options - best venues to see live / electronic music
- Cultural offerings
- Family-friendly activities
- Accommodations - most interesting places to stay
- Outdoor adventure options

The second format includes roundups of multiple destinations around a specific theme. Examples:

- Best beach towns for digital nomads
- Best cities to move to if you're a millennial
- Best beer towns
- Cheapest places to travel in South America
- Road trip itineraries

Matador editorial regularly posts trip planning calls for submission at the [Marketplace](#), however we're always open to new title ideas, especially around US capitals and World Cities.

2. Identity

Identity pieces are broken down into two categories:

- **Cultural Identity** pieces examine (often in a humorous way) customs, culture, and language. They have a special place at Matador as they allow people to share truths about their culture in ways that may not be widely known outside of their home country (an example: [How to piss off someone from Greenland](#).) Matador also has a firm rule about Cultural Identity pieces: Contributors *must be from the culture they're writing about*. In other words, no writing about [Signs you're born and raised in Argentina](#) if you're not Argentine.

- **Traveler or "Mass" Identity** are essays that masses of people can relate to simply by age or identity as travelers. Examples: [Advice from 30 year-old me to 20-year-old me](#), and [Half of American Millennials say they'd consider leaving the US. Here's why I've already left](#).

3. Issues

Matador is not a political or news site. Our editorial does not take an official political position, nor do we consider overtly politicized articles for publication. That said, we do consider *personal stories* connected to the news or issues, especially when travel-related. Our goal when [covering social and political issues](#) is to *humanize the news.* For example, instead of an op-ed that simply

argues a political position about terrorism, we publish pieces like [Why I'll never cancel a trip because of a terrorist attack](). Here, the author takes us through a narrative that's less about the issue of terrorism and more about his own personal experience dealing with the preconceptions and fears of family and friends.

Another example: In the aftermath of the tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan, a contributor wrote a very personal piece about corresponding with an ex-girlfriend and how her language revealed an amazing resolve [inherent in Japanese culture and language.]()

If you wish to write about issues, world events, or politics, don't start with the issues or events themselves. Instead, consider how you're *personally connected* to the issue at hand. That's the story we're looking for.

Finally, issues pieces should be *timely.* If you're writing about an event or current issue, you need to submit it as close to the event as possible. Pieces that come in about events now weeks out of date typically do not serve our audience.

4. Visual

Whereas much of our trip planning and identity content covers well known places and cultures, visual content is an opportunity to blow our audience away with things we've never seen before. Examples:

- [I was among the first Westerners to document the Mongolian taiga. What I found was amazing]().
- [People of the Earth: The San tribe]()

The number one issue with visual content is when contributors fail to provide interesting / useful captions. Before submitting any visual work, please carefully read our [guide to compelling captions]().

Overall, regardless of the kind of article you submit, we look for writing that *follows the guidelines below*.

STYLE GUIDE

A note on introductions

Every article needs a short introduction. It shouldn't be longer than a couple of paragraphs, but still should should do a good job of "placing" the reader in the story by giving proper context. Consider how you can concisely answer:

- Who are the relevant characters?
- What is the subject of the story?
- Where does the story take place?
- When did it (or will it) took/take place?
- *Why should this story matter to its readers?*

Voice and tone: Kill all marketing language

So much of travel media and travel blogging reflects "advertorial" or what we call "marketing language." Marketing language is designed to promote or sell a place. It's full of cliches and typically very "dumbed down." Marketing language is the opposite of the natural, conversational way people communicate in real life.

Worst of all, writers who use marketing language often unwittingly "package" people and places, for example, "Costa Rica is known for its friendly people!"

This is exactly what we DON'T want to see at Matador.

Your job isn't to "sell" a place or culture, and especially not to "speak for" any group of people.

Please study the following in detail to identify and eliminate any marketing language in your own writing:

Cliches

"Sweeping vistas" / "Mecca for adventure lovers" / "hidden gems" / "a charming blend of old and new"

Think if this were actually how you'd describe a place in a phone call to your best friend. Would you ever tell them "Ireland is a land of sweeping vistas, a charming blend of old and new"?

Of course not.

To reiterate: You're not trying to "upsell" anyone on anything in your writing. Cut the cliches and write in natural, conversation manner.

Meaningless abstractions:

"Amazing views" / "stunning landscapes."

Vague descriptions are generally what a writer uses to cover up not knowing specifics. Always use specific terminology and place names.

Marketing verbs

"Boasts" / "offers"

Marketing language includes a number of empty verbs, especially "boasts" and "offers." These are common in advertising because they attempt to force a certain emotion or emphasis. Example:

"Sierra Nevada National Park boasts 7 different trails..." / "The DeSoto restaurant offers 6 different breakfast sandwiches…"

Would you ever use this kind of language when describing a place to your friend?

Eliminate these verbs from your writing and relay the information in an original way.

Marketing "constructions"

Beyond cliches, meaningless abstractions, and empty verbs, marketing language includes several telltale "constructions." These include rhetorical questions, addressing an abstract group, and using awkward introductory phrases.

Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions attempt to "force" a certain emotion on the reader, but in the end just come off as meaningless**.**

"Ever wanted to dip your feet in the world's deepest lake? Well you can here!"

"Who doesn't love white sand beaches?"

Speaking to an abstract group

Similar to rhetorical questions, falsely "addressing" an abstract group or, simply, "everyone" is a way to force emotion on the reader, but which ends up sounding superficial.

"For the art lover, there's no place like Savannah."

"This itinerary will blow the minds of any beer-lover."

"Everybody loves the beach!"

Introductory phrases

In marketing language, introductory phrases often come as a heavy-handed "setup" for the "punchline" at the end of the sentence--typically the name of a place, feature, or business. Note that each introductory phrase in the sentences below is *italicized*:

"*Tucked into a cove on this remote island*, Summerhaven resort is the perfect place to unwind!"

"*With sweeping vistas and affordable prices*, Mar Vista is your next destination!"

Another common form of these introductory phrases is giving a range of options/descriptions and tying them together with "from" or "whether" :

"*Whether you're looking for great coffee, homemade pastries, or a chill atmosphere,* High Five Cafe is sure to deliver!"

"*From laid back mountain vibes to a cutting edge electronic music scene*, Asheville has it all."

What we want: Scene-building through concrete details

Instead of using cliches, abstractions, awkward introductory phrases, rhetorical questions, and other marketing constructions, simply narrate your story in a straightforward, declarative way:

> *High Five Cafe has great coffee and homemade pastries. Several of the baristas are local djs, and on Sundays they perform live sets that transform the main space into lounge.*

Note how this more narrative construction creates the sense of a *scene.* We refer to this as "scene-building." Here's another example, from a [guide about Chicago](#). The author isn't trying to "sell" Chicago in any way, but simply focusing on the people, the sights and sounds, helping place you in the scene:

> *You ride the escalators down from LaSalle Street Station with the men and women who'll spend the day shouting over one another on the trade room floor. Men in tuxedos and*

women in black dresses wield instrument cases across Michigan Avenue to make it to warm-up for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. You hop on the El…and quickly wish you'd never bothered — Chicago's urban confines are best explored on foot

Concrete details

Scenes are built out of *concrete details,* the opposite of abstractions. Example: Instead of something abstract like "The Green River is a wonderland, a paddler's paradise," note how concrete details give a strong sense of "scene" and of the author as an *authority*:

> *The Green River flows through the Green River Game Lands, a 14,000-acre wilderness area owned by the people of North Carolina and managed by NCWRC. It's near the small town of Saluda, North Carolina, home to what was once the steepest railroad grade in the country. Although it's only 40 minutes from Asheville, because of the ruggedness of the terrain (the Blue Ridge escarpment), it feels very remote once you're in there.*

Active vs Passive voice

Always try to write in active voice. It's the most natural form of communicating.

Active voice is when the subject of the sentence performs the action. Ex:

> *I've visited Alaska each Spring for the last four years.*

In this case, the subject ("I") is performing the action ("visited.")

Passive voice is when the subject is not performing the action but receiving the action, hence the term "passive." Examples:

> *Dallas is known for great Mexican food.*

In this case, the subject ("Dallas") isn't performing, but receiving the action--("is known for.")

Slang and Profanity

Your work will be read by thousands--potentially millions--of readers from all different demographics. While it's ok to use a bit of slang and / or profanity if it's part of your natural

writing voice, it can come off contrived and get boring fast, particularly if it's overdone in the opening paragraphs. Keep in mind that slang / profanity only really works if balanced by lots of insightful observations and concrete details.

Fact checking and name checking

Please check and verify all information in your article.

You need to name check accurately as well: .

Examples:

Matador Network v The Matador Network
Adirondacks v Adriondacks
PayPal v Paypal

Grammar and Spelling

Before submitting your work, please make sure your copy is clean. ***This means running it at least once through a spellcheck / grammar check***. We recommend using [Grammarly,](#) which has a free Chrome extension.

Finally, please note that we use always use the Serial or "Oxford" Comma:

CORRECT: "France, Italy, and Spain" [comma before the "and"]
INCORRECT: "France, Italy and Spain" [no comma before the "and"]

Formatting

Please do not use two spaces after a period. To make sure you only have one space after any punctuation mark in your copy, use the "Find and Replace" tool in Word with two spaces in Find and one space in Replace and hit "Replace all".

Do not capitalize each word in titles / subtitles. Only capitalize the first letter of the first word of your title / subtitle and proper nouns.

CORRECT: "The 5 hottest restaurants in Seattle right now"
INCORRECT: "The 5 Hottest Restaurants in Seattle Right Now"

U.S. spelling

Sorry, Canadians, and folks from the U.K.: We publish using U.S. spelling.

Section headings / Links

Always break down information into sections with section headers. Hyperlink places or businesses mentioned in the body of the section, however leave the section headers themselves unlinked. Correct example:

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve

Michigan has vast underwater preserves and sanctuaries thanks to its thousands of miles of shoreline. Thunder Bay is on Lake Huron (the eastern side of the mitten).

Hyperlinks should go to the official government website of the place or if it's a business, its official business site. If a business doesn't have its own website, link to a useful source like a Facebook page. When you can't find any website for a business, please include the first line of their address in parentheses.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

IMPORTANT: We work exclusively with contributors who have joined the Matador Creators Community. Through this platform you'll be able to provide:

- Short, one-paragraph bio (feel free to include links)
- Bio pic
- PayPal email address
- Links to social media

Please submit your work via the "Submit work to editors" button on your dashboard in the Creators Community.

PAYMENT

Submissions at Matador are divided into two categories:

- Solicited submissions are articles / stories submitted in response to a specific call for submissions at the Marketplace, or from an editor soliciting specific work. Payment for

solicited submissions ranges from $20-$60 depending on article length and media assets. All solicited articles are accepted / paid on-spec.

- Unsolicited submissions are submissions sent to Matador for review for publication without being associated with any particular call for submission. Matador does not pay for unsolicited submissions.

Matador's pay periods run from the 22nd of the month to the 21st of the next month. Payments are generally processed around the 1st of the month following the pay period during which the article is published.

There's no need to send us an invoice. We'll organize that for you.

Once again, we look forward to reviewing your work, and wish you the best of luck.

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