

Lucy Tobias

Questions asked by North American Travel Journalist Association

1. What got you into travel writing?

As a newspaper reporter my idea of a good day was getting out of the office and finding stories. To that end, I came up with the idea of a weekly parks page which meant I'd go visit a different park every week – and write about whatever they had to offer – tubing, hiking, biking, cabins, the whole enchilada.

That expanded when the New York Times Regional Group started sending me around Florida to write both travel and environmental stories that went out on the wire.

On one jaunt, 10 days of doing stories in the Everglades included going to Coconut Grove to interview Marjory Stoneman Douglas (she was 99 years old at the time) the author of *River of Grass*. Leaving her house I realized for the first time that finding undiscovered places and stories is my true calling – and it still is.

2. What's the most challenging part of travel writing?

First, clearing the decks and the calendar to leave home for days or weeks. Then, once on the ground keeping an open mind for ideas (mainly talking to locals) that are not on the must do, must write list made ahead of time.

3. One item you can't go without on the road?

My reporter's notebook – yes, I still fill them up.

4. Most unusual or memorable travel experience.

Many to choose from – but here is one visual that always brings a smile. Arrived in London and found my room not available for several hours. Left suitcase there and started walking down the street. Saw a sign that offered rooms and could see a dining room table with a vase of flowers in the basement. Knocked on the door and asked if it was possible to have tea. I didn't know that dining was just for boarders. It was late afternoon. The owner ignored my ignorance and graciously led me to that table in the basement. Sunlight streamed through the window and lit up the flowers. A white Persian cat came over and curled up in my lap. Tea arrived served with freshly baked scones. And I thought, not for the first time, "It doesn't get any better than this."

5. Best piece of advice for travel journalists

Turn around. Yes, I know you are making a beeline for that museum or bridge or whatever but it may be that you are hurrying past the best photo, the real action. A photographer advised me early on to always stop periodically and do a 360-degree full turn - look all around – that way you never get tunnel vision and are open to the unexpected.