



Traveling the world from a swivel chair

Confessions of a Lonely Planet

Do travel writers go to hell? is Lonely Planet writer Thomas Kohnstamm's homage to the world of travel writing and his role in globetrotting for the planet's most popular series of guidebooks. It contains all manner of predictable wrongdoings, mistakes and months of adventure that we nine-to-fivers might associate with traveling for a living. There are revelations of living with a Brazilian prostitute. There's a confession to dealing illegal drugs (because he wasn't paid enough to get by). But the thing that's working the industry into a frenzy is Kohnstamm's confession to writing about Colombia, without actually visiting the country.

"They didn't pay me enough to go to Colombia," the Seattle-born, 32-year-old stated to one Australian newspaper. "I wrote the book in San Francisco. I got the information from a chick I was dating, who was an intern in the Colombian consulate." Nice to know.

Kohnstamm admitted to using a combination of the Internet, tourism brochures and various local contacts to research his writings, and then stitching it all together as best as he could for the book. As a result, he is now at the center of a heated debate about guidebooks, pay rates and travel-writing ethics in general.

Chief executive of Lonely Planet, Stephen Palmer, said he was disappointed by the revelations. Publisher, Piers Pickard, said his admittance was "disingenuous" because Kohnstamm was hired to write about the country's history, not to travel there personally for review material.

Sounds like they're panicking to us.


It might be true that paid writers shouldn't feed us re-hashed information, but with a deluge of readily available information online from visitors who've walked these paths before us, of course, a few writers are going to get lazy. Technology has changed the way we travel and the way we relate to, research and pay for each adventure.

This said, are physical, printed guidebooks as valid within the genre these days? Even the latest book, published yesterday, could become irrelevant tomorrow when a hotel/restaurant/beach in a place to which we're headed is bombed, washed away or closed down thanks to a rat plague.

Internet information, over tried and tested guidebooks – can even be converted into handy, downloadable reads that we can carry with us on our phones and iPods. What will our great grand-kids be packing into their rucksack, years down the road, we wonder.

Kohnstamm's controversy might not be helping his reputation or our favorite travel brands into printing future trustworthy guidebooks; but it's definitely doing some good for the publishers handling his latest, personal effort.

Apparently, *Do Travel Writers Go to Hell?* is flying off the shelves faster than the Colombian guidebook he was hired to contribute to in the first place.

Still sounds better than a nine-to-fiver, if you ask us. 

»TRAVEL

www.travelblog.org

You'll know this one. At least one of your itchy-footed friends will have signed up, bringing you frequent emails stating their latest ice-cream on a gorgeous beach or mad dash from a rhino in Botswana (if they're slightly more interesting). Travel Blog is a never-ending collection of travel journals, diaries and photos from all sorts of journeys around the world. It's free to set up and with limitless space for personal blogging and photo sharing, plus an active discussion board; it's a must-have when you're 'bookmarking' for that next trip.

»FOUND CAMERAS AND ORPHAN PICTURES

www.ifoundyourcamera.blogspot.com

Here's a little something to restore your faith in this cruel, cruel world. A kind and thoughtful American set up this blog, after finding a memory stick containing photos that were obviously being missed by somebody. IFoundYourCamera is a continuous project, dedicated to reuniting lost cameras and orphan photos with their original owners. Should you happen to find a missing camera, instead of stealing it ... or handing it into the police (as of course, you would do); upload a few snaps to this blog and see if the owner gets in touch. Think of all those holiday moments you could rescue.

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