

Itineraries

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ON THE ROAD

Joe Sharkey

Blowing the Horn For Other People's Blogs

I AM constantly being advised that I need to acquire and maintain my own business travel blog. "It will reinforce your brand," someone in the travel business recently told me with a straight face.

Incidentally, I am not a technology-averse Luddite. I am merely wary of suggestions, even those of a digitally advanced nature, that appear to involve any further diminution of my leisure time. And I do, in fact, have a Web site.

Years ago, I had the foresight to register a domain. You can look it up: www.joesharkey.com. Here is what the screen has said since the day I claimed my domain: "This site is under construction and coming soon."

My wife gets a laugh out of that. "You should put the same notice up in the attic," she said, alluding to a weeklong burst of manic shelf-building I did in our unfinished attic in July 2004. Let's just say, the attic remains "under construction."

Meanwhile, I would hasten to argue, there are plenty of travel blogs and Web sites that seem to be doing the job just fine.

For perspective, I checked in with Peter Greenberg, the travel editor of the "Today" show and a person who travels more, and to more far-flung places, than anyone I know.

"I don't have a blog because I'm too busy reading others," he said the other day. "I think they're a great form of citizen journalism." Mr. Greenberg also has a weekly radio travel talk show syndicated in 100 markets, which strikes me as a kind of broadcast blog, if there is such a thing.

"I learn stuff that the mainstream press is not covering," he said. "However, having said that, it is incumbent on me as a journalist to double-check the veracity of everything I read online. Just because it's entertaining, it doesn't mean it's true, of course."

You think? Some travel blogs are all attitude and no original research, seemingly typed by hung-over media manqués whose idea of reporting is to tumble out of bed late each morning and desperately scan the newspapers for items to make sarcastic comments about.

In fact, in 2004, researchers at the University of South Carolina surveyed the 100 most popular news-related blogs. More than half the bloggers who responded said they got their information from newspapers,

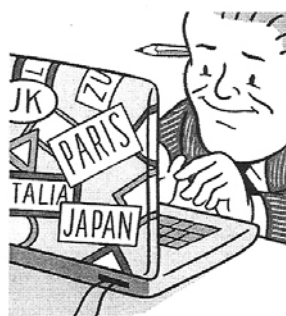
and a significant number of the rest said they got their information from other bloggers.

But a growing number of blogs and Web sites devoted to travel issues (a blog is considered to be more of a personal diary and a Web site is more formal, though the distinctions are narrowing) are managed by well-informed people who do solid, original work and carve out niches that simply do not exist in print or broadcast travel journalism.

A prime example, Mr. Greenberg said, is www.Airfarewatchdog.com, published by George Hobica, a man with an uncanny ability to rummage through the rat's nest of airline fare structures and promotions and find the most obscure unadvertised cheap fares, which can then be booked through links on his site.

"This man seems to spend 24 hours a day looking at every possible airfare and airline Web site," Mr. Greenberg said. "Plus, the guy is always right."

Here are some of the travel blogs and Web sites that I like, and trust: David M. Rowell's well-informed and chatty Travel Insider, which offers a sharp weekly newsletter (thetravelinsider.info/blogs/ti/); www.Flyertalk.com, for all things about frequent-flier mileage programs, a part of Randy Petersen's online empire; Joe



Chris Gash

Brancatelli's subscription site, www.Joesentme.com, full of informed and sometimes acerbic commentary and useful links; and for airline news and trenchant weekly analysis, Mike Boyd's www.aviationplanning.com.

Another of my favorites is www.Johnnyjet.com, which started out as a newsletter in 1999 that its publisher, John E. DiScala, sent by e-mail to friends and relatives. It is now a blog packed with personal travel diaries, photos of his own worldwide travels, useful links and tips on fares — and most alluring to me, brimming with the sheer joy of travel.

"When you think about it, you can be in Connecticut in the snow and be somewhere warm in what, three hours? It's a miracle!" said Mr. DiScala, who takes along a digital camera and blogs continually on his weekly travels.

"All I need is a high-speed Internet connection," he said.

Here are some of his own favorite blogs: www.hobotraveler.com, www.travelblog.org, www.gadling.com and www.onlinetravelreview.com.

Undoubtedly I've overlooked some good ones. E-mail me your candidates. Meanwhile, don't hold your breath waiting for my own blog to go up. The attic comes first, I am reliably informed.

On the Road appears each Tuesday.
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