

FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR

Leah Walker

By Maralyn D. Hill and Sherrie Wilkolaski



LEAH WALKER

Bio: Leah Walker is a travel and food writer who has as many stories as she does shoes. Whether living it up in a Four Seasons or in a Bedouin tent in the desolate desert of Wadi Rum, Leah wants to experience all the world has to offer. She's served time as a high school English teacher, basketball coach and a software technical writer before breaking into the non-lucrative, yet thrilling world of travel writing. In addition to her site, LeahTravels.com, Leah contributes to The Daily Meal, Travel Squire, The Daily Basics, Luxe Beat Magazine and Forbes Travel Guide. She's also a Texan, which really says it all.

Every month we will feature one of our writers so you can gain some insight into our talented consortium. Each has their individual style and perspective, which we would like to share.

For our first featured contributor we selected Leah Walker. It wasn't a tough decision as her work is outstanding and she is full of surprises, we never know where she will end up next, traveling from one continent to another. Her passion for travel is infectious her interview provides an interesting insight to what drives her to keep discovering new worlds.

Leah exhibits her exceptional talent as she guides you through, "Haute Hong Kong Hotels." Currently, Leah is in Paris on assignment, so there will be French connections soon. LeahTravels is also entertaining reading.

How did you discover your love for travel?

I grew up taking family road trips around the United States, but it was my stint studying Spanish in Costa Rica that ignited my fascination with travel.

Are you more passionate about writing or photography? Why?

Writing has given me travel opportunities beyond my wildest dreams. It's definitely my thing. However, I'm also passionate about photography—it's my favorite form of art. Since buying my first DSLR two years ago, I've managed to take a few really good photos. I've also deleted a million bad ones. Though, I'd never insult actual photographers by calling myself one...yet.

What is your writing process?

My best ideas come as I'm falling asleep or driving, so always have a notebook handy to jot things down. When I sit down to write, I pop in my headphones and turn on the Ludwig van Beethoven station on Pandora. Honestly, my writing process is laborious. It takes me longer than most to churn out an article. I obsess over alliteration, allusions, metaphors and other literary devices. It's the former English teacher in me.

When you get the chance to pick your travel destination, where do you go?

A few years ago my answer would be Las Vegas. I'm a huge blackjack fan and have visited Vegas at least forty

times. Now I'm all about Europe. With so many cultures and cuisines within a short proximity of one another, Europe is hard to resist. The history, art and architecture of the continent also captivate me.

If you could be anyone else, who would it be?

I wouldn't want to be anyone else but myself. Everyone has struggles, fears and insecurities, and I've just figured out how to deal with mine. There's no way I'd want to start from scratch being someone else. Though, Sir Richard Branson with his own airline, island and wavy, golden hair might be tolerable for a month or two.

What motivates you to be a luxury journalist?

I may be from Texas, but I'm no oil heiress. By writing about luxury, I have the opportunity to experience a different world. Private experiences, drivers, fine dining, glamorous locales, turn-down service and little stools for my purse--it's an intoxicating rush.

What is one of your favorite experiences while traveling? Describe it.

Despite having so many incredible opportunities through work, it is a personal trip to New Zealand that reigns as the best. I spent three weeks driving through the North and South Islands engrossed in the natural beauty. Even in my imagination I never thought a place so phenomenal could exist. New Zealand is my first travel love.

Where haven't you travelled that you would like to eventually visit?

I've yet to step foot in Africa. I'd love to start by exploring Cape Town and then set off on a road trip through the wine region and Garden Route. Seeing the big five is a must.

Do you have a favorite dish or chef? Describe them (or include recipe with credit).

I simply adore chef Dean Fearing and not just because he's a fellow Texan. I met the "Father of Southwestern Cuisine" and owner of Fearing's in the Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, in Honolulu while covering the Hawaii Food & Wine Festival. His enthusiasm for food and life is infectious, and he's as humble as they come. Plus, he makes the best chili I've ever eaten.

How do you enjoy spending your free time? Hobbies?

Since I've started travel writing I rarely have any free time. I'm either on a trip or writing about one. However, I always make time for an afternoon walk with my two dachshunds. Seeing how excited they get always makes me smile.

The business of luxury is always changing. What are your thoughts on this? What do you enjoy about it? Where do you see it going?

It seems as if luxury brands are always trying to one up each other, creating over-the-top extravagance. For instance, the London upscale retailer, Harrods, is currently building their first hotel that's set to open in 2018 in Kuala Lumpur. Not content with five stars, this will be a seven-star hotel. Given globalization, emerging economies and the growing number of millionaires and billionaires, especially from the BRIC countries, the business of luxury will be good for the foreseeable future.

If you were stranded on an island, name one person and three items you would bring. Why?

I'd definitely bring my husband. Not only does he make me laugh, but he's incredibly handy. I'd need a Bushmaster Survival Knife. It comes with matches, a snakebite kit, animal snares, flashlight and all sorts of practical items. Since I burn, blister and freckle, I'd have a Costco sized bottle of SPF 30. Lastly, coffee is a must. I'll chew on the beans if there's no water.

If we came to your hometown, what would we do? Attractions? Restaurants? Tell us about your favorite places.

I'm guilty of not taking advantage of all Houston has to offer. When would-be visitors ask me what they should do, I start by listing my favorite restaurants. Given its diverse population, the city is filled with plenty of ethnic restaurants, as well as Texas BBQ and comfort food. I love Ragin Cajun for the classic New Orleans po-boy; Vic & Anthony's for steak; Hickory Hollow for a chicken fried steak; The Breakfast Klub for wings and waffles; and Chuy's for Tex-Mex. Houston is a great food town, but it also has world-class theater and museum districts.

What are three necessities you won't travel without?

I'll never be caught without my iPhone, Bose Q15 Noise Cancelling headphones and Tabasco sauce. I have no tolerance for loud talkers or bland food.

What does Luxe Beat Magazine mean to you?

Joining Luxe Beat on the ground floor is an exciting endeavor. Being surrounded by so many seasoned journalists is such an honor, and I aim to learn as much as they'll teach me. ■

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