

Travel Writer Ruksana Talks Journalism in the Digital Age

Travel might not be in the cards for us right now, but Deskpass member and travel journalist, Ruksana Hussain is giving us a virtual tour of her favorite destinations, plus where she coworks from when she's home in Los Angeles.

Your career as a journalist is pretty impressive. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into that industry?

I didn't get to study journalism in school as it wasn't considered a 'safe' profession for women in India back in the 90s. Funny enough, despite a degree in sociology, my first job straight out of college was as an editor for a chess magazine!

My professional experience had taken a bit of a detour when I first moved to the U.S. and I began volunteering with a few local publications in Georgia initially since I couldn't legally work in the country. That helped get together a few decent clips for my portfolio which I then used to introduce myself to other editors I wanted to work with when I could apply for jobs.

This eventually led to regular writing gigs for print and online magazines, both trade and consumer publications, mostly within the U.S. but sometimes outside as well. It also resulted in editorial positions and proofreading/copyediting work after I did a few courses at the local university.

How has it changed over the years (and how have you adapted)?

I believe there was a time when journalism paid well and there were outlets aplenty to work with. Those glory days had clearly passed me by when I entered the field. Even in the past few years we have seen many publications shut down and now, with the coronavirus situation, even more are closing shop, especially many in the hospitality sector which has been heavily affected by the pandemic. I have never only worked in journalism.

As a features generalist, my writing tends to cover a wide array of topics, beats and industries. I also expanded services to include content marketing/management for small businesses and entrepreneurs. This keeps my day interesting with blog posts, newsletter content, company profiles and a few other tasks.

I enjoy learning and am especially curious of things I wouldn't generally happen upon left to my own devices so whether its AI and data security or disability and nonprofits, I'm game if there's a story to tell.

We love your lifestyle magazine, [Traveler and Tourist](#). Tell us a bit about that.

I invest in my skills every year in some shape or form and about two years ago that was an introduction in Adobe InDesign through General Assembly. I enjoyed it and put together a proof of concept for a digital magazine, but it's taken more than a year to see that come to fruition. The idea being we are all travelers and tourists in whatever way we choose to enjoy that experience, and this is an all-inclusive peek at a culture curious/conscious lifestyle.

It's a subscription-only publication that is distributed online. The new redesigned version launched this year, the inspiration edition is out online, and the spring edition is next. It's available for free, simply subscribe for it on the site and the next edition will land in your inbox. It's mobile friendly as well and hosting online means folks can easily link to external websites directly from the copy. We've had some great travel ideas and tips, and good feedback too.

What is one (or more) destinations that really surprised you?

I try not to read too much into a destination before I head there as I want to give every place the same opportunity to wow me. Each location has its charm and one would be remiss to travel the world looking through a singular lens. Despite reading about certain venues or experiences, you can never tell how a place will make its mark on you and what you take away from that is such a personal conversation.

I sure had a culture shock bathing in the onsens in Japan. I thought I was prepared for Auschwitz-Birkenau when I visited Poland but I cannot even begin to describe in words how that hit me. Flightseeing over the Kluane national park in the Yukon was breathtaking just as much as climbing the pyramids in Teotihuacan on a trip to Mexico City.

What might be not so impressive to some could be the most marvelous experience of a lifetime for another. That's the magic of travel.

What are the biggest misconceptions about working for yourself? What are the biggest rewards?

The biggest misconception is people thinking I work for one employer and not realizing what a hustle it is to constantly have a steady flow of work coming in from multiple clients. Some folks actually aren't entirely sure how

that happens and assume this is a hobby while I actually 'work' elsewhere.

As a travel journalist I would be invited to destinations or travel on assignment and many assume it's a 'free trip' not knowing how much work goes into applying for those opportunities, preparing ahead with research, onsite interviews and background, writing those stories once back and sometimes even having to try selling them too. Every byline is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that people don't see.

The biggest reward is that byline and the opportunity to tell that story for others to learn from, enjoy, and be informed. Choosing your projects and clients, flexibility in schedule, and creating your own rates is definitely rewarding.

Do you have any tips to offer other aspiring writers about finding new work/remote work?

I would say there is a lot that an introduction or referral can do. Introduce yourself to prospective clients, forge the relationships you'd like and ask for a recommendation when you can. A lot of writers forget that aside from pitching ideas they can also check with editors if there are stories they want to assign.

If an idea is rejected in one outlet it might be great for another. And sometimes it just isn't the right time for a pitch so don't throw it out yet, revisit it at a later date and there's a good chance you might tie it to something timely and relevant. There are many avenues to work with content and words now so find your sweet spot and work it to your advantage. And remember that practice makes perfect.

You will try this many, many times before you finetune your approach but that's just the confidence you develop the more you make yourself available for the right jobs.

We see you're based in LA. What brought you there?

The husband's job initially but he is also an actor and the move was perfect. It was in the works for a long time so glad it finally transpired in 2015 and we have called Hollywood home ever since. Weirdly, I didn't know a soul here and the first year was a struggle, but I've grown to enjoy the beast that is Los Angeles. Since I was already working full-time freelance from home, the move was a tad bit easier.

What does a typical day look like for you?

Working with different clients and working from home means no two days ever look the same. I try to have a flexible schedule with my top five things to accomplish and then everything else sort of builds around that backbone. I do work fixed hours, so I have time to step out for a walk, run errands and (pre-coronavirus) head out for meetings and events that have now turned into fully virtual appointments.

I keep the earlier part of my day strictly for stories to work on, interviews, research and the latter part of it for marketing, outreach, social media, any administrative tasks and general housekeeping. I try my best not to work on weekends though sometimes the way deadlines fall that's just part of the package working freelance.

I also like to theme my days, so I have Money/Motivation Mondays, Wellness Wednesdays, Free for all Fridays, and Tuesdays and Thursdays are serious to-do list days.

How do you decide what Deskpass spaces to go to? Any spaces you really love? And why?

When I first joined Deskpass, I considered a bunch of spots but got lucky finding one conveniently located just minutes from where I live. [Ignited Spaces](#) is my go-to spot. They also have a wine and cheese happy hour Wednesdays which is usually the day of the week you'd find me there (cos' Wellness Wednesday remember)! Their staff at the reception are friendly and helpful, and I enjoy the 11th floor views of the city as well as the open floor plan of their community workspaces.

Other times I choose spaces based on where clients would like to meet. I've worked out of the [Cross Campus locations in Santa Monica](#) and [El Segundo](#), both were conveniently located and had some form of parking nearby that was easily accessible. Parking is a deal-breaker in this city. I like to see where a client or event is located and find a spot to work from that's central to where I am traveling from.

image credit: Facebook/Ignited Spaces

Have you [joined our online Deskpass community](#)? It's free! As a member, you can find events in your area by hitting the '[Events](#)' tab. You can also join virtual events hosted by us, tap into networking opportunities from fellow members, and access [exclusive perks](#) from companies like General Assembly and FreshBooks.

As you return to coworking spaces, we want you to work where you can feel productive while also [feeling safe](#). Deskpass is a Work From Anywhere solution for companies with remote or distributed teams. Through our network of thousands of workspaces across the US and (soon) the world, we provide on-demand desks, [meeting rooms](#) and [private offices](#) by the hour, day, week and month. There's no setup or monthly fees—it's purely pay as you go.