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TRAVEL GURU WENDY PERRIN ON MAKING THE TRIP TO TRIPADVISOR AND WHY SHE'S TIRED OF PHONY TRAVEL PHOTOS

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I've a confession to make: I'm a obsessive-compulsive lurker on TripAdvisor.

Like some crazed lover, I go into stalker mode the moment I glimpse a potential vacation happening. I'm especially addicted to the euphoric flush of reading hotel reviews one after another, and I trawl the restaurant sections and forums just to "confirm" must-dos I'd read and heard about — whether it's the much buzzed-about Little Bao in Hong Kong or the Hamlet Castle tour from Copenhagen.

But the sheer volume of opinions and reviews sometimes leave me feeling more confused than enlightened. With every review clicked on, there are more decisions to make (tiny room in a central location versus stylish hotel that's a 20-minute walk to the train station?). Let's not forget how I need to take into account how some reviewers are simply less exacting when it comes to standards or more impatient for service.

So I was stoked when TripAdvisor



I'd like to see lower airfares so that more families with kids can afford to travel.

Wendy Perrin

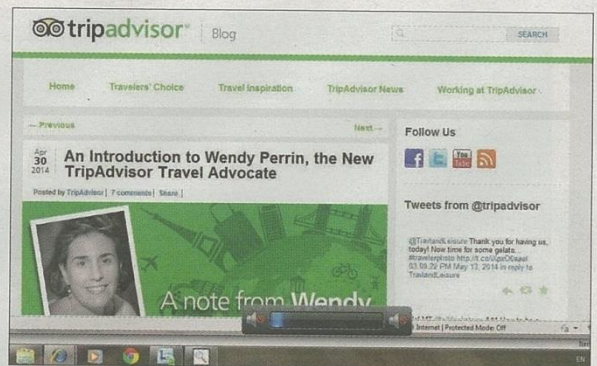
announced two weeks ago that Wendy Perrin, the former Conde Nast Traveler consumer news director, is now its Travel Advocate. I love reading The Perrin Report in the magazine and her blog, The Perrin Post, because the journalist really gives you insider advice. Perrin herself is equally chuffed to be part of the TripAdvisor family. "I'm most excited to tap into the massive knowledge base of the world's largest travel community," she said. "This yields a gold mine of information. I'm eager to curate those findings, see what trends they point to and form snapshots of what's happening in the travel world today."

Her new gig involves sharing her insights, answering questions from members and writing about popular travel topics on the TripAdvisor blog. It's like having an expert do the hard work for you — and as good a guarantee of the most legit travel tips as you'll ever get.

**Q: How will writing for TripAdvisor be different from the advice and content you wrote for Conde Nast Traveler?**

**A:** I'm still me. My advice in the print pages of Conde Nast Traveler was

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Look out for Wendy Perrin's post coming soon on the TripAdvisor blog.

## THE PERRIN LOWDOWN

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usually geared towards a more sophisticated, affluent slice of the travelling public; but the advice I gave on my Conde Nast Traveler blog was always geared to a much larger, more varied Internet audience. I've always kept it real. And I'll continue to do so at TripAdvisor. Of course, I also wrote a tonne of longer articles for Conde Nast Traveler — dispatches from my own personal road-testing of travel experiences. Such reportage likely won't run on TripAdvisor, but anyone looking for it can find it at <http://wendyperrin.com>.

**Q: With the sheer number of voices on TripAdvisor, how would you go about getting the best insights?**

**A:** It sounds like a daunting task, doesn't it? Luckily, I've help from TripAdvisor's tech geniuses. They know how to take a mountain of information from travellers and slice and dice it every way. I can ask them questions, and they can delve into all that data to get answers. (TripAdvisor says the quantity and quality of reviews, ratings and opinions are analysed and can be applied to different categories to sift out the best information.)

**Q: How do you see experts like yourself and Yahoo! Travel's Laura Begley Bloom (previously dep ed of Travel+Leisure magazine) changing digital travel content?**

**A:** As "experts", we've had far more travel experiences than most people and we have informed opinions. But we can't be everywhere at once or stay up-to-the-minute about every travel experience in existence? I can't speak for Laura but, in my case, I think it will be highly useful to the travelling public if I can listen to what millions of travellers are saying, cut through all the chatter, distil the most important takeaways and serve those up to the world.

**Q: On your website, you stated that pictures that are not enhanced and manipulated as the photos are as honest as the reporting. But travel photos today thrive on filters and such. What's your take on it?**

**A:** Because so many travel photos have been manipulated — and put through

filters that turn overcast skies into Tahitian sunsets — they're dreamy to look at. But they're not the reality of what the traveller will experience. Personally, I'm just tired of phony photos everywhere. As a hard-core traveller who wants to make smart decisions about how to spend my precious travel dollars and time, I want to know the reality of what I'm going to get. In fact, next time you're on a hotel's website and you can't find photos of the pool or beach or views — remember you can tell as much about a hotel from the photos that aren't on its website as the photos that are.

**Q: Some travellers lament that the magic, mystery and adventure in travel have eroded due to smartphones, apps and even TripAdvisor. How can we inject some of these back in our digital age?**

**A:** Use these digital tools for research, but when you're out and about exploring your destination, put them away. Get your face out of screens, grab a beer with the locals and ask their advice. Don't follow what every traveller with his nose in a guidebook or app is doing. Blaze your own trail.

**Q: You've been in the travel industry for 25 years. Is there anything you hope can be improved? And do you rue any loss or developments that occurred within this industry?**

**A:** I'm still waiting for the invention of a teleportation machine. I'd like to see lower airfares so that more families with kids can afford to travel, and fewer lines and crowds at tourist sites everywhere. I rue the drastic devaluation of airline miles, the increase in nickel-and-diming at hotels and the overdevelopment I've seen in many countries — especially China. Perhaps the biggest change over the past 25 years is that the world has become much smaller. It's harder to escape. You go to Timbuktu and people can still reach you on your mobile phone. On the other hand, look how far we've come: Now, when you book a resort, you needn't rely only on what the brochure promises; you know what you're getting ahead of time. We may have given up some of the romance of travel, but in exchange, we've now got real intel.