

From **WRITING ABOUT TRAVEL** to **BOOKING IT**

Andrea Wren, 39, lives in Manchester with her son, Keir, 17. As a travel journalist, Andrea developed such expertise that she set up her own travel agency.



What's your career background?

I was a freelance travel journalist for national papers and women's magazines for five years, going on amazing trips. As the recession hit, it was becoming more of a struggle to find freelance work, so I wanted to find another income stream. And I had this lifelong passion for travel...

What happened next?

I had the idea of starting my own travel agency. As a travel writer, I've always enjoyed not just exploring as a tourist, but introducing places to other people – this seemed the obvious focus for my business.

Has your journalism background helped launching the agency?

Apart from actual knowledge of the subject, I had the research skills to find out everything I needed to learn about starting a business, as I didn't have a clue to begin with. I used my networking skills to help me meet other travel businesses. My interviewing skills help me find what clients want most from their

holidays. My contacts and experience help me publicise my business. As for my writing skills, they've been a fantastic help – I've been able to write all my own marketing material and press releases. And because I am an experienced travel journalist, my clients trust me to know what a good luxury hotel should offer.

Do your two careers feed into each other?

Although I've had to drop some journalism to do more work on the travel agency, I have also had more travel-writing opportunities, because people have seen my website. Being a journalist swung it for me to attend an all-expenses-paid trade travel conference as a reporter last year, and this in turn has helped me develop vital contacts in the travel trade press.

You must go on some amazing trips.

Absolutely! I've been to Australia twice in the last year for the agency, and I have just got back from a trip to Morocco for a travel magazine. I really am living my dream. 

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HOW TO STRETCH YOUR SKILLS

Career-jumping expert Steve Miller, author of *Change Your Life, Grab That Job* (Headline, £7.99), says:

● **First, open your mind to the idea of a career stretch.**

Business Link (businesslink.gov.uk) has advice on exploiting your ideas as well as inspiring career-move examples.

● **Identify your stretchable skills.** List the duties and responsibilities of your current job. Then, write next

to them the skills you have that help you carry out your responsibilities – and add any natural talents and interests you have outside work.

● **Next, plan innovatively.**

Think about how a new direction could build from your existing career, or how your existing career could give you an edge in a new

area. Are there any gaps in the market you've spotted while in your current job?

● **Be prepared.** If you're taking a big leap, it's often advisable to get experience before committing fully, even if this means offering to do a project for free or keeping your old job and working weekends on your new area.

● **Take a course in your new career path.** This can be great for making contacts as well as learning about the industry. Using your existing contacts to branch out is a great idea – it could be that your existing employer becomes a new client of yours. A little cheek can show initiative.