

Exposing the secret life of a freelance travel journalist



By Leigh Andrews

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Not your typical South African travel journalist story of local girl transplanted somewhere fancy, New Yorker Sarah Khan fell so in love with our landscape that she made the permanent transition a few years ago. She shares her love story with our land below and the key to her peripatetic work/life balance.



Khan snapped on safari at Royal Malewane.

To many, it's the ideal job title – travel journalist. And with Africa's natural beauty, it's a firm favourite as ideal location. That's exactly what happened with travel journalist Sarah Khan. A journalist for about a dozen years now, she completed her master's degree in journalism at Syracuse University in upstate New York and went on to work as a magazine editor in New York City for about seven years, the last four of which were spent at *Travel + Leisure*, a top travel magazine in the US. She'd secretly always wanted to be a freelance writer though – a lifelong ambition for many with the gift of the pen – so when she moved to South Africa in 2013 following her first visit to

Cape Town in April 2012, which she dubs 'a revelation' as, "It was the first place I'd been to in a long time that truly blew me away, not only as a tourist destination, but also as what I perceived to be an extremely 'liveable' city." So when she married a South African, it gave her a chance to test out whether that hunch was true as well as the opportunity to try her hand as a freelancer.

Try she did, to great success as she now contributes regularly to the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, and numerous other publications dotted across the US, UK, and India. It's hardly a surprise then that she confesses: "I haven't missed having a desk job since!"

African business perspective: Media responsibility

As a freelancer focusing on foreign media, she doesn't interact with local businesses much, but does find business here to be very, "relaxed," if you will, especially coming from a city like New York. "Deadlines seem to be more of a suggestion here, and judging by how early rush hour starts in Cape Town, it seems like working past 3pm is a cardinal sin here."

Looking further afield to the rest of the continent, Khan stresses that improving the global opinion of Africa as a business destination is more about the accessibility of getting to and from the continent, and the dissemination of information about what's going on here than anything else, as we definitely have the talent. "It seems like people aren't nearly clued-in enough to the wealth of ideas, talent, and financial opportunity on the continent as they should be, and some of that responsibility lies with the media to be sharing stories on a wider platform," she says.



A selection of images from Khan's [South Afrikhan Insta-Travel Guides](#), © her blog, [The South Afrikhan](#).

Shifting focus to the profession of journalism, she says these days it's equal parts scary and exciting. "Scary, because so much of what has been the norm for years is being rendered obsolete; exciting, because of the opportunities and innovations that can move the industry forward. However, at this precise moment it feels like we're in the midst of some major growing pains as we make that transition."

Freelance work/life balance

She explains that the sudden surge in content means not all of it is being vetted for accuracy or edited for clarity in time before publishing, which can lead to a lot of mistakes. Linked to this is the fact that competing with social media means sometimes media outlets are more concerned with being "first" rather than "right." Added to this is the fact that the increase in amount of outlets and the need to constantly be generating new content leaves the cash-strapped media industry less inclined to compensate journalists fairly.

It's very erratic and inconsistent as some days she's booking back to back meetings, some days she's "in sweats all day plugging away at a deadline," and many days don't involve any writing at all. Instead, they're a never-ending abyss of research, pitching, and admin. While no two days are alike, she says: "It's definitely nice being able to set your own schedule and work on your own terms."

Those terms include finding the time to blog and keep her social media accounts active as part of that ever-elusive 'work-life balance', especially as just trying to figure out the perfect balance between traditional media and social media is challenging enough.

Social media can be both a fun stress release outlet and a way to stay on top of news and trends that are important in the industry, but most of us could stand to spend less time on it. Blogging, on the other hand, is something she's likely to focus more on, especially as she originally wanted to chronicle some of her personal experiences in transitioning to South Africa

there, but has always just been so busy with actual work that finding time to write for fun has fallen by the wayside. It's definitely something she'd like to refocus on in the coming months though, and something that would inspire others looking to follow in her footsteps.

Find out more about Khan by following [her blog](#), her [official portfolio](#) of work and of course her [Instagram](#) and [Twitter feeds](#).

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