

A look back at ten years of a travel blogger's journey. The places, the stories, and the memories.

**By Anna Marie Jehorek** 

### INTRODUCTION



It all started with a journal that my mother gave me when I was nineteen just before our trip to London and Ireland. She told me I would want to take notes and write down the names of places we went and the things we saw. I took this to heart and before we had landed, I had begun taking copious notes.

I didn't just write the name of a restaurant, I wrote down what we ate and the name of the server, if I happened to catch it. I even made a note of the music playing in the background. *Buffalo Soldier* by Bob Marley was playing in the cab that we shared with the mother and daughter from Scotland. We had just been to see the Pirates of Penzance at Leicester Square and they had been to see the movie, Tootsie. They pronounced it Toot-See!

I was obsessed with making sure I remembered every detail of the journey.

Looking back, this could have been a major clue. And while the travel blog was still years away from being invented, I like to think I was uniquely positioning myself for things to come.

Thanks to Mom for having the foresight to buy that journal for me.

Thanks to you, my readers.

I can hardly believe that ten years have gone by since that first blog post. If you have been with me for the entire journey, I commend you and thank you. If you are new or been here a while, I hope you have enjoyed the travel tips, trips, and inspiration.

Here's to another ten!

As always, I wish you...

Happy Travels!

Anna Marie

### Why Pull Over and Let Me Out?

Finding the right name for a blog is not as easy as it may seem. And if I had done enough advance research, I may have done something clever like include a keyword to make it easier to find the blog online. Oh, I don't know maybe an important word, say travel?! But you see, I did not set out originally to become a travel blogger. So, let us start at the beginning.

I have lived in the Raleigh, North Carolina area since 1992 except for three years when my husband's job took us to Atlanta. During the time in Atlanta, I applied to write for a new online publication called Examiner.com.

I got the gig! They made me their Atlanta Outdoor Travel Examiner. And while that sounds impressive, it was a lot of work. In addition to running story ideas by an editor, researching, writing, and publishing my stories, to get paid, my stories had to get clicks.

This was 2010-2011 time period, and I knew extraordinarily little about "getting found" online. Beyond Tweeting and putting my posts on Facebook, it was all a big mystery to me. So, the gig turned from being a fun part time writing job to a full-time article promotion click-seeking cycle.

By the time we moved back to Raleigh, and I started writing for Examiner.com as their Raleigh Outdoor Travel Examiner, I began to question why I was working so hard to drive traffic to a website that belonged to somebody else.

You see where this is going, right?

Why not drive traffic to my own website?

My husband Jason is a whiz with IT and building websites, so it was not long before I was busy writing and stockpiling a slew of travel stories in preparation for launching my new travel blog.

From the start, I knew the blog was not going to be one of those geared towards the traveler who sells everything to explore the world drinking tea with shamans in foreign lands. This travel blog was going to be accessible to those who do not always have the

time, funds, nor inclination to jet off to extravagant locales but still want to go, see, and experience various places and things.

I wanted my blog to reflect me and the kind of traveling I enjoy. I also wanted to share my journeys, tell a story, and offer some tips and inspiration for others. I especially wanted to seek out the slightly off-the-beaten-path attractions that we miss so often or never know existed at all.

But what does one call a blog that encompasses a mélange of road trips, historic sites, unusual attractions, and a touch of Ireland?

I gave it a lot of thought before the name came to me. I recalled a trip I took in my twenties with Elaine, a childhood friend of mine. We had planned a road trip from my home in Maryland to visit Colonial Williamsburg. It was a grownup re-creation of a trip the two of us had taken with the Girl Scouts when we were in elementary school.

I had one request before we left home. I made Elaine promise we could stop so I could read every historic marker we came across on our way. With each historical marker we encountered, I would call out, "Pull over and let me out!"

That's it!

No, it is not necessarily SEO/Google search friendly, but it is memorable, and it has special meaning. It also encapsulates a feeling I think we've all experienced when traveling. That moment of discovery, or arrival when something is so captivating, you cannot wait to experience it fully. *Pull over and let me out!* 



## The Early Days



Some of life's favorite memories are made while traveling.

Once I decided to start the blog, I went to work writing stories. In the early days, they were short and included a couple of pictures. I was especially drawn to obscure and off-the-beaten-path places. As soon as I had a handful of posts ready, I flipped the switch on PullOverAndLetMeOut.com – I was a blogger!

July 10, 2012, was the official launch date for the blog. I knew little about how to be a travel blogger, nonetheless, there I was, flying by the seat of my pants. I was discovering all the things I didn't know as I went along.

For example, I did not know the ideal number of words a blog post should be, so I just wrote what I felt like writing. I also didn't consider how to categorize my stories. I had not a clue what SEO was, and I had no idea how or *if* I could make money.

I think because travel blogging was still so new, I was fortunate. If there was a place I was thinking of visiting, I would send an email and ask if they worked with travel bloggers. Back then, many places were thrilled to have a travel blogger interested and would put together media swag bags and offer free tickets. Or as was the case

frequently, the marketing people I would reach out to seemed leery, or unsure. I could feel their unspoken question, what is a travel blogger and what do they want, really?

And while some were reluctant to welcome me, most did and with open arms. Consequently, I got to enjoy a lot of attractions and events and then share them with the blogosphere. I would leave a location, go home, write about it, and then share the link to the story. Visitors' bureaus and attractions loved the blog posts and would share my stories on their websites, social media, and the like. It was an exciting time to be a travel blogger.

One of the best aspects of blogging in the early days was the comments. People would read my posts and leave comments! I have noticed in recent years that people just don't take the time to comment on blog posts like they did in the early days. I get it, I don't leave comments very often either. But back when I was new to this gig, it was incredible.

I remember one post, I had written about the Valley Green Inn, a colonial tavern on the Wissahickon Creek in Philadelphia. It is a magical spot on the edge of the city. I had written about an amazing lunch I had had there after visiting Valley Forge and I shared a bit of the history of the inn. Two years after I posted the story, I received a comment from one of the descendants of the family that had owned the tavern.

"In looking for connections to my family (Livezey) I found this site and the great photos. I was so pleased to find such good pictures and information regarding my relatives' former lands and its surroundings. With luck, before I am too old, I can make a pilgrimage back to my roots."



Valley Green Inn, Philadelphia, PA

Receiving comments and feedback like this was exciting for me because it made me realize how one small story that I thought was insignificant could mean a lot to someone else.

In the early days of the blog, I received several such comments. I once wrote about the Ave Maria Grotto in Cullman, Alabama, and received a comment from a filmmaker who had just finished a film about the life of the grotto's creator, Brother Joseph Zoettl. Another time, a photographer who captures the final honors at Arlington for families left a comment on a post I wrote about a visit to Arlington Cemetery.

"A wonderful story and complemented with some great photos... I capture the final honors at ANC and produce a book for the families... you may enjoy exploring my website, especially the slide show under the tab entitled "FINAL HONORS "The GALLERY Tab also contains some more of my work...

Sincerely,

John Michael"

Hearing from people who had read my stories made what I was doing exciting and fun. It also provided me with a renewed sense of purpose. I was not simply writing. I was sharing. These remarks and revelations have had a significant impact on how I write.

I am talking to a friend when I write a blog post about a trip, an attraction, a festival, or an experience. I write as if I were telling a close friend everything. The good, the bad, and what I would do differently next time. And, while we are in a hurry these days and do not take the time to leave many comments, I try to remember the early days of PullOverandLetMeOut.com. When a comment informed me that my story was not just disappearing into the ether and that visits to the site were not just numbers calculated by Google Analytics.

Readers are visiting my website, and I am sharing information that I would want to share with a friend. I think I will take the time to leave a comment on someone's blog today.

## **Travel Blogger Conventions**



Samantha Brown

I had met a lot of travel bloggers online but had not met them in person until I traveled to Huntsville, Alabama for the Travel Bloggers Exchange (TBEX) conference in the spring of 2017. This was a game-changer for me. It was incredible to step from behind my computer and being a lone blogger to gather with others doing the same thing. Many of them were doing it on a grand scale and having tremendous success.

And while my blog had some Google credibility based on five years of consistent posting and traffic, this conference only served to educate me on how little I knew about the "business" of blogging. My little travel blog that began as a hobby took on an entirely fresh look and I hit the ground running when I returned home, trying to implement at least a fraction of the information and ideas I had learned in three short days.

Keywords, search engine optimization, affiliate links, no-follow links, bounce rate – it was as if I were drinking from the proverbial fire hose when it came to the business of blogging. It was overwhelming.

In addition to information overload, I also got to enjoy the best of FAM tours. A FAM tour is a familiarization tour for media. I took a ghost tour of Huntsville followed by an

architectural tour of the city. These tours along with the multiple evening events for the conference attendees proved to be even more important than the educational sessions in that it was at these events and on these tours, connections were made and friendships too.

The Huntsville conference would inspire me to attend several others including conferences in Quebec, Canada, Billings, Montana, Corning, New York, and I was scheduled to attend one in Kansas City and Lafayette, Louisiana when the pandemic hit. I have not made it back to a conference since, but know once the timing is right again, I will be ready to return and catch up with old friends, while learning and looking for innovative ideas for keeping PullOverandLetMeOut fresh and entertaining, and successful too.



My first blogger conference was TBEX in Huntsville, Alabama in 2017

This was taken at the Space & Rocket Center

## Do you get free stuff?



A cool hat was in my swag bag from the folks at Visit Milwaukee

Do you get free stuff when you are a travel blogger?

I get that question from time to time, and the answer is – *sometimes*. I have never been one to seek the free stuff because I do not want free stuff to cloud my opinions when I am writing about an experience. I write my blog as if I were sending a letter to a friend. I am telling the reader what I liked, what I would have liked, and occasionally, what I did not like.

If any segment of a trip is complimentary, I always say so. In the early days of travel blogging, when I reached out to a Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) to get itinerary suggestions or ideas, they would frequently offer complimentary tickets to museums or a swag bag.

However, as the Instagram influencer became a thing, I noticed CVBs became more aware and savvier, so they began to ask for numbers and proof. I totally get it. These visitors' bureaus have limited budgets and were being taken advantage of and some of these "influencers" and "bloggers" were giving a bad name to those of us who had been

trying to elevate the profession. It was now necessary to include stats, followers, and audience make up in my media kit.

Because I take a slightly different approach to my blog, I never aggressively sought out the freebies. I have worked with CVBs like Huntsville, Alabama, Hershey, PA, Wilmington, NC, Visit Richmond, Virginia is for Lovers, and a few PR firms. I even got the best swag bag and amazing itinerary from Visit Milwaukee, but most of the writing I do is based on my own travel ideas and wanting to share my experience.

Sure, free stuff can be fun, but for me, I would rather go, see, and pay my way so that I can be honest when I tell readers if it is worth the price of admission. That is also why I genuinely appreciate when PullOverandLetMeOut readers use my affiliate links. It sustains me and the blog!



The folks at Busch Gardens, Williamsburg were great to work with!

CHAPTER 5
A travel blogger who hates flying



I am not afraid of flying. I just do not like it.

There, I said it.

Flying has always been a necessary evil when it comes to traveling. The first flight I ever took was from Dulles outside of Washington, DC to London Heathrow. I was nineteen and had never been on a plane so when I landed and discovered my ears would not pop, I began to panic.

"Great, I wait 19 years to fly and now I'll never hear again."

Two hours later, I heard a loud noise like someone turning on an old-time radio and getting a static "pop" – my ears finally opened.

I should have taken this as a sign, but I was simply happy I could hear again.

Since that moment, I have flown but only when driving was not an option. I find the entire process unpleasant. The last flight I took was in the summer of 2021 and I believe the TSA agent at Chicago O'Hare who groped me could have been brought up on charges in any other circumstance. I had made the mistake of forgetting the hotel key was in my back pocket. Without warning, without explanation, she just grabbed my

bum with gusto. I remember seeing my son waiting and looking with a stunned expression on his face. When I was done being molested, I rejoined him and made light of it saying, "next time she could buy me a drink first." But inside I was saying, HELL NO, I am not putting up with this assault ever again.

I have never been one of those flyers who makes it look easy. I always feel awkward and clumsy as I make my way through the airport. As I board the plane, I am trying not to clunk people with my shoulder bag. I am always smiling though, because I am reminded of the scene from the movie "Airplane" as the flight attendant hits the passengers in the head as she carries a guitar down the aisle.

Sitting on a plane is uncomfortable and when the facemasks came into play, I lost all patience for flying. That last trip turned into a total of twelve hours flying or sitting in an airport. I had a massive headache when it was all over and quietly vowed, I would only get on a plane again if it were absolutely necessary.

I love the road trip! I relish seeing the sights along the way and stopping for meals or to see things I might have missed if I had flown. That is the essence of the blog, really. Pull Over and Let Me Out.

A travel blogger who does not like flying is not such a terrible thing after all.

Will I fly again?

Sure.

Will I enjoy it?

Probably not. But you can rest assured if I am flying it's because the destination is worth it!

## **Homeschooling Travel Mom**



Homeschool Days in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, 2016

Homeschooling lends itself to a great deal of freedom. One of those freedoms includes the ability to take a lot of field trips to the places we study in the history books. It also opens a range of possibilities for a travel blogger.

I am a history buff to begin with, and living in North Carolina, we are close to an abundance of historic locations many of which offer homeschool days and activities. It has been a delight being able to incorporate homeschool trips with travel blogging. Moreover, the memories made on these "Mom and Me" trips over the years are priceless and cherished.

I love being able to partner a lesson plan with a great field trip where my son gets hands-on opportunities and an immersive learning experience. Over the years I have found a multitude of places that are ideal educational travel destinations. From Colonial Williamsburg's and Patrick Henry's Red Hill's Homeschool Days to destinations with outstanding kid tours like Jefferson's Monticello or Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the possibilities are limitless.

At the beginning of each school year, I look over the curriculum and then try to find the perfect field trip(s) for our studies. I had a blast creating special lesson plans in the lead

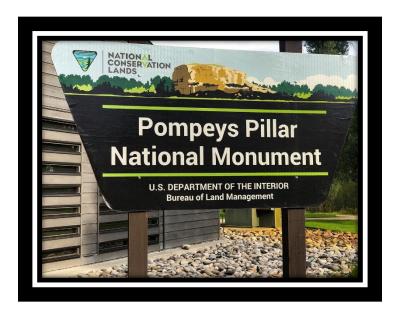
up to our family trip to Ireland in 2016. Each week prior to the trip we would learn about a new topic pertaining to Ireland. Subjects like its government, geography, industry, sports, literature, music, and popular culture all became fun lessons and a way of providing a deeper understanding about the place we would be traveling to.

I have to say I was mighty proud as we approached the Wellington Monument in Phoenix Park and could boast that Connor actually knew who Wellington was! It is in these moments that I am reminded of the educational value of travel. Pairing traveling with writing makes it even more impactful and I hope one day when my son is older, he will look back on these trips with fond memories in much the same way I do now.



Approaching the Wellington Monument in Dublin's Phoenix Park

# Favorite surprises!



Pompeys Pillar near Billings, Montana is a favorite surprise!

I love the unexpected discoveries that happen so often when I am traveling. That sight I had not planned to see, the new thing I learned about, or that ah-ha moment I could not have possibly anticipated prior to my journey. Those surprises are what makes traveling magic for me.

As a travel blogger, those are usually the places I cannot wait to write about. I have already got the story written in my mind before I have departed. These are the travel moments that make my heart sing.

I can remember the very first time this happened for me as an adult. My friend Elaine and I were in Vermont. We had gone there on a whim for a week of summer vacation. We happened upon a charming old church, so we began wandering through its graveyard. The graves had stones dating back generations and they were fascinating to read, but then we came across a small sign with an arrow pointing that read, "Robert Frost grave."

I remember we both looked at each other, taken aback, and then followed the arrow. We had made the unexpected discovery of the famous poet, Robert Frost's grave. He

had always been one of my favorites so to accidentally discover his final resting place was truly serendipitous.

Since then, I have made many surprise discoveries on the road and have also been surprised by things I did not anticipate. However, I always categorize the favorite surprises based upon the feeling I had when I found the Frost grave.

Some places that qualify include, Pompeys Pillar on the Lewis & Clark Trail, and Little Big Horn in Montana. These places and their historical significance moved me more than I anticipated. There's also Huntsville, Alabama, which I loved, and The Helen Keller Birthplace in Tuscumbia, Alabama, where the tour guide drew me in with her riveting account of Helen's childhood. Likewise, Rapid City, South Dakota, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the village of Watkins Glen in New York's Finger Lakes region enchanted me.

There are also several attractions that captivated me when I least expected them to. From historical taverns to enthralling tours, I have enjoyed the moments where I got swept away in the surroundings. Most recently, our lunch in the swimming pool at Café Alcazar in St. Augustine and the night we spent in the former lunatic asylum turned hotel in Staunton, Virginia, The Blackburn Inn, have turned out to be unexpected pleasures.

There are so many wonderful travel surprises that I have had these past ten years, too many to list. However, with each unforeseen discovery, I have made sure to write about and share it with my readers. These moments and places where the words and stories seem to effortlessly write themselves are the driving force behind the blog.



The Beer Can House in Houston, Texas is a favorite surprise!

# CHAPTER 8 Be a tourist, it's okay!



Go ahead and do the touristy stuff, I encourage you!

Are you a traveler or a tourist?

There is no right answer to the question.

That being said, I have met a variety of travel bloggers along this journey. Some I clicked with and others, not so much. The ones I typically do not click with tend to be the ones who take themselves too seriously.

I am not advocating being rowdy or disrespectful while travelling. Never! What I am advocating for is to allow yourself to be a tourist and have fun. So often the touristy spots are touristy spots for a good reason.

While I love to go off-the-beaten-path and travel the road less traveled (*see what I did there with the Frost reference?*) I still embrace those travel moments that border on being cliché, or dare I say, a tad cheesy.

If there is a selfie station or a place to put my face in the hole and take a picture, you will find me there. If there is a gift shop in the lobby, I will be milling through the merchandise. If there is a costumed interpreter, I will be there listening and hanging on every word. And not just because I am a blogger.

It is because I am not a travel snob.

Every location, no matter how exotic, ordinary, or touristy, has a story to tell. I enjoy these sightseeing opportunities and moments, and I encourage you to do the same. It is easy to become so preoccupied with following strict itineraries, finding the ultimate adventure, and ensuring the perfect Instagram photo op that we forget to have fun and be tourists.

Take advantage of your travel opportunities and enjoy the experience!



Embracing my inner-Viking in Dublin on the Viking Splash Tour of the city.

CHAPTER 9

Chalk it up to experience



Sometimes, you must roll with it.

No matter the amount of research or prior planning involved, travelers must always expect the unexpected. Sometimes things do not work out or do not go the way we planned. Other times, we get somewhere and discover the destination is just, *meh*.

We have all been there.

And yes, even as a travel blogger, from time to time, I have been disappointed or left wanting more. When I write about these moments, I try and inject a little bit of humor. If we cannot laugh at the situation, we are taking life far too seriously.

As was the case when I booked our bus tour to Mt. Rushmore. I made our reservation two months ahead of schedule and could never have anticipated they would assign us with the back row of the bus. A three seat back row that really was better suited for two people. Oh, and it was right by the restroom. I ended up standing a portion of the tour because I was so cramped. Ah, live and learn. From here on out, I will confirm prior exactly where my seat on the bus is.

I have also visited attractions that just did not hit the mark. The tourist location where the historical timeline was poorly laid out, the less than enthusiastic tour guide, the reservation I had made but wished I had booked elsewhere – it has happened to us all at one point or another. But these are the travel moments we chalk up to experience and use to assist us with future plans.

I call it my travel war chest. The arsenal of miscalculations and disappointments that informs me on my next itinerary or that I share with my readers, so they do not hit the same speed bumps.

I try and stay positive when I share these less than stellar travel truths, because let's face it, we all enjoy and experience things differently. Thus, whenever I find something, I did not care for or that left me saying, *meh*, I try and frame it in a way that is helpful. I never want to be *that* travel blogger. The one that throws down her opinion as if it were gospel without regard for how harsh or rude, they come across.

I want to share travel tips, trips, and inspiration. I do not want to be negative. There is plenty of that in the world without me adding more negativity.



Our seat on the bus wasn't great, but the tour was incredible!

# The people and friends along the way!



Travel opens the door for lifelong friendships

One of the best parts of traveling over these past ten years has been the people I have met along the way. Travel truly opens the door for lifelong friendships. I have made new friends and been able to spend time with old friends as well as family while writing about my experiences.

I have made so many new friends at the various travel conferences I have attended, and I look forward to seeing them each year. Similarly, I've made friends with blog readers. Patrick, a fellow writer, was one of those friends who volunteered to be a beta reader for my second novel!

I have also met so many wonderful PR specialists with CVBs, tour guides, and business owners that I could not begin to list them all. But they've each left an impression and many of those places or destinations I have departed with a hug.

I have also been able to rekindle friendships from years gone by. Favorite travel moments with friends include a sunset cruise in St. Michaels, Maryland with my high school girlfriends and a trip to see the Beer Can House in Houston when I looked up an old friend from high school who lives in the city.

I not only take a lot of pictures while I am there, but I am taking mental pictures that I carry with me wherever I go. It is the friends along the way that makes traveling and travel blogging fun for me. I never want to take those golden moments for granted.



The ladies at Toast in Charleston, SC were so friendly, they made my visit special.

# Beer, Wine, Whiskey, and Food!



Savor the flavors on the journey!

Nothing tells a better story about a place than the food and drink associated with it. I encourage everyone to enjoy the flavors along the way. I always research popular foods in the areas I visit and try to incorporate them into my itinerary.

Because I do this, I have stepped out of my comfort zone several times and tried new things that I would never have tried before. Poutine and rabbit confit in Quebec were new to me. As were Indian tacos in Montana. I also learned there is a big rivalry over which city has the honor of being the pimento cheese capital of the world, Charlotte, North Carolina or Columbia, South Carolina.

I love to try the regional favorite dish and frequently dive right in and learn just how that popular food became iconic and a staple associated with the location. Food tours are one of the best ways to get the full flavor of a city and they are also fantastic ways to learn the story of the citizens and how they came to create these cuisines that have become a part of their story.

This is the same with beverages on the road. Whether it be beer, wine, whiskey, or other popular beverages, tasting tours provide great insights into a location.

I love taking winery tours. Each one has a distinct story and flavor. It is fun to take sips to try and discern the nuances of each wine. The scenery is usually gorgeous as well. There is something so relaxing about strolling vineyards and breathing in the fresh air that I revel in.



Grapevines in Nebraska

Since I started the blog, I have discovered that wine country is not only in California or Italy. I have visited amazing wineries in North Carolina, Virginia, New York, Georgia, Quebec, South Dakota, and even Nebraska. I have been blown away by the number of indie wineries dotting the landscape and the enterprising spirit of the owners who have created delicious wines using the grapes that grow best in the region. Before blogging, I had no idea about the soils, growing seasons, grapes, tannins, steel barrels, oak barrels, or any of what goes into winemaking.

I have gotten an education these past ten years and while I am no aficionado, I have learned so much and have such an appreciation for the time, energy, and skills that go into operating a winery. Moreover, each one I have visited plays a vital role in the place its located.

While I tend to favor visiting wineries, I have been to a few craft breweries and distilleries. I even got to blend my own gin while on a media tour in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Likewise, I have been to the Kool-Aid Museum in Hastings, Nebraska as well as the Coca Cola Museum in Atlanta.

Food and beverage are woven into the fabric of a destination and are always a key element of traveling. If you can include a food tour or a cooking class when you are on the road, do it! It is slightly outside the box but so much fun.



Sampling a flight in Southern Pines, North Carolina

### Lockdown!



Pasta-making in Chapel Hill, NC, February 2020 – I had no idea what was in store.

I started 2020 filled with hope and plans. By January I already had a full schedule ahead of me. Las Vegas in March, Ireland in late April, several book signing events, two travel conferences that had me going to Kansas City in May and Lafayette, Louisiana in September, and the North American Irish Dancing Championships in Nashville, in July. 2020 was going to be AMAZING.

Well, you know how the story goes.

Not to bemoan or belabor the point, but like everyone else, my plans for 2020 were tossed aside. At first, I was feeling blue. My Christmas present from Jason had been tickets to see Robbie Williams, a favorite singer, in Las Vegas. This was THE best gift I had ever gotten, and it was cancelled. That was followed by the cancellation of my trip to Ireland to promote my second book. I was set to stay with the woman who ran the B&B that I always stayed in, and which served as the inspiration for my novel.

It was a big letdown to see those plans disintegrate.

By mid-April, about everything I had on the calendar for 2020 had been wiped out. Never to wallow in self-pity, I tried to make the best of things. I did a couple of Facebook Live book readings, which was fun. I revisited my photographs and travel journals to find new stories from previous trips and managed to add a few new travel stories to the blog at a time nobody was traveling. And I made a point of keeping my weekly newsletter going.

This was challenging. I did not want my newsletters to become nothing more than pandemic updates. One could scarcely escape the news and the constant barrage of stories about shutdowns, essential and non-essential, zoom meetings, online learning, yada yada yada. Would I add to the cacophony or keep things light and airy?

As a travel blogger, I could not entirely ignore the impact the situation was having on travel, but I also did not want to focus on nothing but pandemic news. The news was depressing. So much so, I found it hard to sit down and write. Anything. It was bringing me down. So, I decided to not add to the grim reports and try to remain upbeat and focus on the positive.

Although every pre-planned trip for 2020 was cancelled or postponed, I did travel. We turned the refunded airline tickets into a new family trip in July to visit Jason's family in Nebraska but instead of flying into Omaha, we went to Denver. From Denver we spent a couple of days in Colorado Springs, then moved on to Ft. Collins, Estes Park, and took a detour through Cheyanne, Wyoming before hitting the west corner of Nebraska.

It felt great to be traveling once again and while we did spend time indoors, most of the sights we visited were intentionally outdoors. Garden of the Gods, Rocky Mountain National Park, hiking in western North Carolina, visiting the wild horses in Corolla on the Outer Banks. All travel, from July on, had a major outdoor component and it did my soul wonders.

I watched my blog traffic go from robust to non-existent practically overnight in March and April of 2020. I added a freelancing gig writing press releases on Fiverr to supplement the loss of income and I am happy to report blog traffic has come back to pre-pandemic levels.

I have weathered what I hope is the worst and am scheduling more getaway weekend trips. However, life is unpredictable, so I take each day as it comes and look forward to taking big trips again, hopefully soon.

I still have that credit on Aer Lingus and a dream of attending a writers retreat on Ireland's west coast, so I keep the hope alive for 2023 and beyond. Only time will tell.

# CHAPTER 13 Ireland and my books.



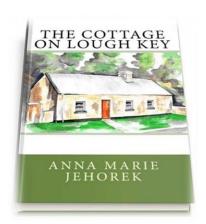
Mrs. Harrington and me at Glencarne House

Readers of the blog know Ireland holds a special place in my heart. My mother's parents are from Ireland, and I have travelled there extensively. As soon as I return from one trip, I am already planning the next.

When my grand uncle was living and I was single, I would go each summer and always stayed at the same B&B. The Glencarne House in Roscommon was owned and operated by the Harrington family. Over the years, I became one of the family members, frequently staying in the family area if they were over-booked. I fell in love with this part of Ireland and always said it would make the perfect backdrop for a novel.

I was right!







So far, I have written two fictional novels set in Boyle, County Roscommon, Ireland. *The Cottage on Lough Key and The House with The Georgian Door*. Both books draw upon my travels and incorporate many of the places in this beautiful part of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

I have written extensively on my travels to Ireland and the blog is filled with stories and I even offer help with creating custom Ireland trip itineraries. It is such a joy for me helping others pull together their plans and create their dream Ireland vacation. I love the country so much, each time a client sets off on their visit, I am envious I am not going with them.

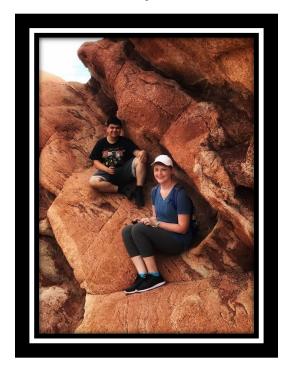
I want to return to Ireland because of the people I have met and the friends I have made. I have also got some ideas for another book or two floating around in my head, which would necessitate a research trip. There's also that writers retreat on Ireland's West Coast that I have been wanting to go to. Now that travel is making a comeback, I am hoping to visit the Emerald Isle again soon.



Signing books in Boyle

CHAPTER 14

The best is yet to come!



Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, 2020

When I started PullOverandLetMeOut ten years ago, I had no idea where it would take me. I only knew I loved traveling and writing about what I saw so I decided to share it with others. I am attracted to the off-the-beaten-path destinations, the historic spots, and the quirkier locations. At the same time, I love the traditional tourist destinations as well as the rural spot with small towns being an absolute favorite.

I have seen a great deal of my home state and surrounding region these past ten years as well as destinations beyond the southeast. Each trip, I set out to share something special about it with you, my readers.

There is still so much I want to see and do. There are also things I want to do with the blog. I would love to revamp the website a bit, add new features, create more videos, clean up the look, and I am always looking for guest posts from readers. I love hearing about your travel stories and sharing your discoveries.

I have had the joy of traveling solo, traveling with friends, traveling with other bloggers, and traveling with family and loved ones. Each trip having its own character

and flavor and special story. With each trip or destination, I look at things and think about the travel tips and inspiration I would like to share in a blog post. I always approach a destination from the perspective of telling a friend about it when I get home. When I write my blog, I am writing to friends.

Thank you, friend, for reading my stories and letting me share my travels with you. I hope that one or more of the stories have served to inspire you to plan a trip or take a journey of your own. I also hope that these stories motivate you to enjoy traveling wherever you are, whether it be a hometown destination or a faraway place, it is the journey and the people we are traveling with that make it enjoyable.

I am thrilled to have been bringing travel stories to readers these past ten years. God willing, I have many more travel stories ahead. *The best is yet to come!* 

As always, I wish you...

### Happy Travels!



The Blowing Rock

### **AUTHOR'S NOTES**

A special thanks to my husband, Jason, and son, Connor. You have been wonderful travel companions and have kept the home fires burning while I have been traveling alone. Your love, support, and encouragement keep me going and inspire me to write.

Thank you, PullOverandLetMeOut.com readers and newsletter subscribers. I appreciate each of you and enjoy telling you, my stories. Your comments, participation in travel chats, and feedback keep me grounded and striving to improve.

### My Books:

The Cottage on Lough Key and The House with The Georgian Door are both available on Amazon.com. Likewise, my custom travel journals are available there as well.

The PullOverandLetMeOut.com Newsletter comes out weekly. To sign up to get the latest travel news visit **PullOverandLetMeOut.com** and sign up today!