

Hosting a journalist – what you need to know ...

Destination Gettysburg typically hosts about 30-40 journalists a year. Many more visit our destination unannounced. Coverage by these journalists – usually travel writers - can be a great way to get your business in front of potential customers.

Every year, hundreds of articles are written about Gettysburg. This “earned” media is important for any industry, but especially travel, where every outlet from network TV to metro newspapers and blogs feature travel content.

Business owners, at times, can be apprehensive about hosting journalists. It’s sometimes confusing what to offer, what to say and to know if they are legitimate.

In that regard, Destination Gettysburg’s Director of Communications, Carl Whitehill, has put together a FAQ about hosting travel journalists:

Are they expecting me to provide my service for free?

Maybe. Travel journalists, and especially bloggers, are often paid little for their content. In other words, they’re not likely to spend \$1,000 on their trip to Gettysburg and sell their story for half of that amount. The more you can do - the more WE can do as a tourism community – to pave the way for this coverage, the better. This doesn’t mean you need to give them everything, but if there is an overnight stay you can provide, or a meal you can offer – the more it enables travel writers to cover our destination. And if you can’t afford to do that – it’s OK. Maybe there’s a media rate (\$50-\$75 for lodging, 50% off for dining) that you can provide.

When Destination Gettysburg sends out overnight requests for journalists, why is my business not selected?

Journalists all have angles – some look for luxury, some look for budget, but almost all look for experience. Destination Gettysburg works hard to pair journalists with the right kind of lodging and dining. While offers for complimentary stays or meals are always appreciated, we must make sure that it fits with the writers’ interests. In respect for our members, we try hard to make sure a property has the best opportunity to be covered in the article and a big way to do that is to match the journalist with the best property we can – whether it’s upscale, discount or anything in between. With this said, Destination Gettysburg does work hard to spread journalists out among properties.

If I host a journalist, am I guaranteed to be included in their story?

Never. Nothing is guaranteed when it comes to journalism. Despite our best efforts to match journalists with our members – dining, lodging, attractions and other experiences – coverage is not something that Destination Gettysburg or the journalist will guarantee. Regardless of whether your business was included in the article, however, you've helped a journalist write about our destination – and that will come back to help you in the long-run.

What should I do if a journalist comes to my business?

In most cases, journalists want to experience a place of business just as a visitor would. There's no need to provide anything special, per se, but make yourself available to answer questions and take care of any needs they have. If you're a lodging property and want to upgrade them to your best room, or if you're a restaurant and the chef wants to send out a few complimentary menu items to taste, that's a great gesture that they are sure to appreciate.

In that same regard, journalists are always seemingly in a hurry or always needing more time. Be patient – do your best to showcase what you think is your best asset, but sometimes they might not agree and want to spend more time looking at a different part of your business. Sometimes, they just need time to Tweet, answer emails, or they are quickly off to another location. Just be hospitable and exchange your business cards so that you can keep in touch.

What should I do if a journalist requests an interview?

First, all businesses should have a policy regarding who is allowed to speak to the media. That doesn't mean your front desk staff or clerk or waitress can't answer questions normally presented by a visitor, but if a journalist pulls out their notebook and is preparing to ask questions, make sure your staff knows who is allowed to talk and who isn't.

Secondly, don't be nervous. A travel journalist isn't likely looking to write anything but a positive story. Just relax and answer questions the best you can. Third, never turn down a chance to be interviewed by the media – it's a great opportunity for exposure and usually means your business stands out and will be included in their story.

I hosted a journalist, but I didn't see any coverage!

Be patient – sometimes coverage takes a long time – months, if not longer. When a journalist leaves Adams County, they may be on their way to another destination and it takes time to download photos, write the story and in some cases, sell their story.

Should I host a blogger? Are they legit?

Bloggers sometimes have a bad reputation – and sorting out the good bloggers from the not-so-good bloggers is not easy. First, if Destination Gettysburg has contacted you about a blogger, we've researched them – just as we do all journalists. While we can't guarantee coverage or that their audiences are always accurate, we've done due diligence in looking at their content, their social media channels, and in some cases, reached out for references from other destinations.

Secondly, blogging is much more common – and legitimate – than it was years ago. As newspapers and TV outlets have cut the travel sections over the past 10 years, the surge of bloggers has been incredible. But that's a good thing. Bloggers often have more specific angles – family coverage, guys getaways, luxury travel, food travel, etc. – that gives destinations and their properties a wealth of opportunities.

Bloggers often have a greater reach on social media, something that no business should under-estimate.

What should I do if I am contacted directly from a travel writer or a blogger?

Let us know. We're happy to help. Members regularly contact Destination Gettysburg for our input on whether a journalist is legitimate, or how they should handle them ... that's what we are here for.

Destination Gettysburg has databases of journalists where we can check their writing, their social media numbers and a wealth of other information. And we're always glad to provide suggestions on what to provide journalists.

The big reason to let us know is so that a destination is correctly covered. As much as we enjoy seeing coverage from those unannounced journalists that we mentioned earlier, we try hard to make sure they understand the destination as a whole – it's a better opportunity for not only tourism as a whole, but the individual businesses to present a complete story of this great destination.

If you have questions about our media relations efforts, contact Carl Whitehill, Director of Communications, at any time – carl@destinationgettysburg.com.