

Adam Mitchell

Trailfinders

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Editor

Organisation: Trailfinders

Location: London, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I grew up in Plymouth before moving to Brighton to study Geography and Environmental Science at The University of Sussex. From here the route to my current role is a little tangential. After graduating I worked in the deeply dispiriting world of estate agency for a couple of years before leaving it behind to travel around the world. A year later I returned renewed and refreshed, moved to London and focussed on my writing full time, while simultaneously working a slew of minor jobs in bars and restaurants across the capital.

I can't recall the exact moment I made the decision to apply for the position of Sales Consultant at Trailfinders. Fortunately, with a degree in geography, a background in sales and customer service and fairly extensive travel experience, I ticked all the boxes; after numerous interviews, tests and five weeks of training I was concocting tailor-made travel plans for clients across the country. Three years down the line the role of Editorial Assistant popped up. I applied and

the rest is history.

Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

The most helpful piece of career advice I ever received came from Scott Adams' blog – the cartoonist famous for 'Dilbert' – who said that you have two choices to a fulfilling career (1) become the best at one specific thing (2) become very good at two or more things.

The first is virtually unachievable – the domain of professional footballers and platinum-selling popstars – but the second is realistic for most people. In my case I have a degree in geography, but I'm by no means a professor; I have travelled more than the majority, but I'm not Ranulph Fiennes and I can write better than most people, but will not be receiving the Booker Prize any time soon. Add them all together though and I make a good candidate for the Editor of a travel magazine.

What do you do as part of your role?

I'm responsible for writing, editing and overseeing the creation of the Trailfinder magazine – a triannual publication that showcases the range of destinations, experiences and holidays on offer with Trailfinders.

Each week varies depending on what stage I'm at with the magazine. Early on in the process I meet with department heads and directors to establish the overall content balance. Following this I spend a couple of weeks researching and writing the features, before passing the copy on to our design department to get the initial designs mocked up. From this point my focus shifts to the holiday delivery in the magazine and so I begin to liaise with our product team, who source all the hotels, tours etc. that support the main features. The final weeks are a whirlwind of back and forth between the design studio, product department

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and suppliers who feature in the magazine to finalise the pages before a presentation to the Chairman and board. Shortly after this approximately one million copies are printed and distributed across the UK and Ireland. I then typically take a well-earned holiday before beginning the process all over again.

What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

First and foremost you need to have a good command of the English language and the ability to write engagingly, whilst still keeping in mind the tone of voice of the company and our commercial considerations. Having a good eye for detail and design is also paramount and, finally, the ability to manage and organise input from a variety of sources.

How does geography feature in your work/ what difference does it make?

It may sound obvious but the more you can know about the world the easier this job is. If I'm writing about a destination I know well I can knock out thousands of words in no-time, whereas a feature about somewhere I've never been may take me hours of reading, research and discussions with colleagues to get it right. Furthermore, as a travel organiser, our obligations go beyond simply inspiring people to get away; it is imperative that we also provide accurate information with regards to where to stay, when to go, how to get there and how to get around in order to live up to our moniker 'The Travel Experts'.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Although it's always tinged with anxiety, it's enormously satisfying to receive the first printed and bound copies of the magazine. To have a tangible product that you have overseen from inception is very rewarding.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?

Travel, travel and travel some more and write about it all the time. I started out with a travel blog for friends and family before writing various freelance articles – some paid, mostly not. If I re-

read any of it now I imagine it would make me cringe but it's essential to keep practicing and honing your writing if you want to make a career of it.

How do you maintain your knowledge and interest in geography outside of work?

I travelled extensively throughout my twenties and that wanderlust never waned – even if my current possibilities to get away have somewhat.