

# Jun 12 "No matter how much you love your job, you'll always need some downtime" - Meet Katie Silcox

*meet the freelancer*

It sounds like a dream career for a freelancer - writing for big name publications like Conde Naste Traveller, penning guidebooks, working as a photo editor for GQ, creating corporate communications for AMEX, while also fitting in time to volunteer each week. This kind of workload made me wonder how British writer and photo editor Katie Silcox does it all. I asked her in this Q&A, and I think you'll agree, her responses are fascinating.

**"No matter how much you love your job, you'll always need some downtime"**



Lindy Alexander is the founder of The Freelancer's Year. She is an award-winning

# Meet freelance writer and photo editor, Katie Silcox



# Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your path to becoming a freelance travel writer and photo journalist?

As far back as I can remember, I'd wanted to work in travel media - there was a travel show on TV when I was growing up that inspired me.

I was lucky, therefore, to find my dream job straight out of university; working on the travel website for a big UK national broadcaster.

That first job sent me abroad once a month to research, write, and film travel stories, and really set the base for everything that followed.

I spent the next 10 years working for companies such as Lonely Planet and Condé Nast Traveller based in London, Mumbai and Dubai.

**Becoming freelance happened almost by accident;** I took some time out from full time work to travel and to do some volunteering - and at that point started getting offers for freelance jobs.

In the end, I decided I had enough work to keep me going and sustain the freelance lifestyle.

## What kind of split do you have with all the work you do?

This is a tricky question as it can vary month to month, week to week, and even day to day.

I'd say on average I spend about two weeks a month working on photo editing, and writing for publications.

I also do two days per week working as a corporate communications specialist and one day per week as a communications volunteer in a centre set up for refugees in Europe.

# Which publications/brands do you tend to work with?

I'm working with GQ Middle East as photo editor (the magazine launched in the region late 2018); this is pretty structured and on-going work.

I also do corporate communications for AMEX GBT.

Other work tends to be more ad-hoc, but includes some freelance writing for publications such as Condé Nast Traveller and independent guidebooks.

## You've worked in-house with loads of publications. Can you share any insights you gleaned from doing these kinds of roles and if they've influenced your freelance career.

Oh, I think it's really helped.

Years of working in-house with publications all over the globe has cemented my knowledge of how the entire process works.

For example, I've never worked as an art director, but I've sat next to them for years so know what they need to do their job and make the pages look great.

I may not be the features editor, but I know that they're looking for in a story - and that **they need people to stick to a word count and file copy on time.**

I've never been part of a sales team, but I understand the important relationship sales and editorial have in today's world, and how to work with them to ensure the best results for a publication as a whole.

# **I've noticed in the last few years the emphasis on video and images. How have you developed your skills in this area and how important do you think it is for freelance writers to also have video/photo skills?**

I've worked with photos and videos for years, and while I'm not a professional photographer or videographer, I am able to shoot and produce smaller pieces when needed.

Luckily I also have the right contacts to make sure I can provide professional quality when needed.

**I'd say it's very important skill for freelance writers today.**

Sometimes a travel writing assignment can be to somewhere quite remote and often the writer goes alone, without a photographer or videographer.

It's important therefore that the writer can also produce some images and/or video as they travel - to save the publication editor or photo editor relying on (let's face it sometimes dodgy) stock images.

With some incredible phone cameras today, it's pretty easy to take images that can run at a small-ish size and illustrate a feature. Though this will never replace the need for a photographer to create truly beautiful images and spreads in publications.

Above and beyond shooting for publications, in today's world, I think it's important for a writer to do this in order to build their own brand - perhaps via a personal [instagram](#), blog, or website.

# **You also run an online travel magazine. Can you tell me a little bit about what prompted you to set this up?**

I do, and I love it.

As mentioned, travel media has always been my passion and for the most part it's been the sole focus of my career, too.

More recently that balance has shifted. While the change is refreshing and I'm really enjoying working in new fields, I just can't let travel go.

My sister and I set up the online travel magazine together - with my professional background in travel media, and hers in marketing and events - we have all the right combined skills and it was really only a matter of time before this happened.

# **Do you (and your sister) write all the content for this site, or do you take contributions from freelancers?**

As a new website, we are doing most of the writing ourselves for the time being.

We also conduct a lot of interviews with inspirational travellers. However, we're keen that our content is always be written by someone who has travelled to the destination.

This means that from time to time we do make freelance commissions - but it has to be a really interesting location or angle, something that we aren't able to produce ourselves.

# Do you have a vision for Contemporary Class and what you'd like it to be in the future?

We began as an online travel magazine, but have started offering media services such as photo and video shoot production, travel feature creation and event consolation and coordination. With so much professional experience, this was the logical step.

## Do you have a routine? What does 'a regular week' look like for you?

I really don't have any routine at the moment, except for working most of my waking hours.

I work with Dubai who start their week on a Sunday, and I also do a full day Friday for another client - so weekends are also almost always lost.

I'm very aware this isn't a sustainable way of working and am looking at ways of making a change to a working week with more of a routine.

## What are your favourite ways of finding clients?

Up until this point, I've been incredibly lucky that they have mainly come to me. I suppose this is a result of having worked in the industry for so long and having a lot of good connections.

To that end, I'd say chatting and making connections is a great way of finding clients.

A fantastic example of a surprise connection for me was when I attended a friend's wedding in Sri Lanka. I got chatting to another one of the wedding guests, who was looking for someone to tour Sri Lanka's south coast and write about it. He took my email address, I flew back to the UK, and a few weeks later I was back out in Sri Lanka again travelling across the south coast and writing it all up.

# What do you find most challenging about being a freelance writer?

Right now, finding the work/life balance.

I love what I do so can put absolutely all my time in to it.

I think this is amplified as a freelancer working with multiple clients because for each individual client you're doing the normal amount of work - but combine them and it really adds up.

I'm realising that no matter how much you love your job, you'll always need some downtime.

## And the best thing?

The variety. I love that I always have different projects to immerse myself in. This way, the work won't get monotonous.

Also, the freedom; if I want to up and work from, say, Bali for a month I can - so long as there's a strong and safe wifi connection.

## Thank you so much Katie, how can people get in touch with you?

Instagram: [@katiesilcox](#)

Twitter: [@katie\\_silcox](#)

Email: [katie@contemporayclass.com](mailto:katie@contemporayclass.com)

*I love that Katie incorporates volunteer work into her week. What do you think about freelancers needing to have video and/or photo skills?*