

TEACHING WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH FOR TOURISM BY EMPLOYING TRAVEL WRITING

JASNA POTOČNIK TOPLER

University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism, Brežice, Slovenia.

E-mail: jasna.potocnik1@um.si

Abstract This chapter examines teaching writing skills in English for Tourism by employing travel writing, which is not only a tool for teaching linguistic skills, but also encourages students to develop research interests and storytelling techniques. When travel writing was introduced to undergraduate and MA students during the English lessons the role of languages in Tourism, Tourism Discourse and Literary Tourism was also discussed with them. As part of the English assignment, students were asked to produce their own travel writing texts, which were discussed, reviewed by their teacher, re-written and – in the case of Master students – at the final stage, also published as an example of a teaching and learning experiment. Thus, this chapter presents travel writing as a successful method of developing travel writing skills inside the English for Specific Purposes classes.

Keywords:

ESP,
language,
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skills,
travel
writing

1 Introduction

In recent years Tourism Study Programmes have seen a lot of changes, and the number of programmes teaching for the Tourism sector increased (Choi, Ruetzler & Wang, 2019); consequently, the number of graduates holding Tourism degrees has also risen (Hsu, 2014). Since the economic contribution of tourism is significant and the Tourism industry creates many jobs, this is not surprising (UNWTO). If in the past requirements for different posts in Tourism were loosely defined or, in some cases, not important at all, nowadays, candidates are required to have a lot of knowledge, various skills and competencies, which are expected to be developed during the study years as parts of the Tourism curricula. Experts in Tourism education agree that, in Tourism curricula, there should be a balance between professional knowledge and vocational skills (Tribe, 2002; Jamal, 2004; Hsu, 2014). Communication skills are definitely among the outstanding ones in tourism. It is expected that employees in the Tourism sector are able to communicate – in speaking and writing - in several foreign languages, especially in English, which still holds the status of *Lingua Franca* (Rogerson-Revell, 2007, Potočnik Topler, 2014). In addition to that, “foreign languages are becoming the intellectual tool for the development of intercultural competence, in the sense of declarative knowledge and communication skills” (Balič 2009, 1). This is of the utmost importance in Tourism, which is always a cultural experience (Bryce, MacLaren & O’Gorman, 2013), and language is an inseparable part of it therefore, tourism is also a linguistic experience. This is one of the reasons why mastering English in writing is one of the most important goals in English for Tourism. One way of achieving this goal by employing travel writing is discussed in this Chapter.

2 Language as the Core of Tourism Business

In Tourism, communication and discourse are crucial concepts, significant for the positioning of people, companies, products, attractions and destinations. In this respect, writing skills in the English language are essential. Namely, in the construction of the tourism discourse, and in the branding of products and destinations, linguistic choices are viewed as vital. What is more, the language of Tourism is not only considered a specialised discourse, but also a means of making profits (Potočnik Topler, 2018). Language in Tourism, especially the language of promotional texts, motivates and attracts tourists to buy products, services, or visit

certain destinations, and, consequently, makes profits. Also Thurlow & Jaworski (2011, 287-288) defined Tourism as a “communicative business” and “a language market”. In fact, the authors (2011, 289) opined that “language and languages sit at the very heart of the tourist experience, its representation and its realization, its enculturation and its enactment”. Thus, language as the carrier of communication, ideas, and connotations, has a significant role in the Tourism industry and in the branding of particular tourism destinations. It is, in fact, the most important tool for getting the messages across. Also, efficient promotion can occur only through the efficient use of tourism discourse, which addresses the needs of potential tourists by the right combinations of words and other linguistic choices. Therefore, it is significant that the experts in the field of Tourism, especially in the field of Tourism Promotion and Branding, are capable of utilising language as a fundamental tool in the Tourism industry. In this respect, teaching English for Tourism, and, to be more precise, teaching writing for tourism, is essential.

3 English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes is defined as “the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language, where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, 2). It is “a field of practice and scholarly inquiry” (Liu&Hu, 2021, 113), which aims to meet the specific needs of learners of English (Tsao, 2011). Thus, in the development of English for Specific Purposes, teaching has played an important role (Liu&Hu, 2021). Many factors contributed to the development of ESP, among them 1) A growing demand for English courses for specific purposes after the Second World War, 2) A turn in linguistics from language features to language use in specific environments and situations, and 3) Developments in educational psychology underscoring learners` interests and needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, Liu & Hu, 2021). Especially in the 1990s and later, many linguists turned their attention to the areas of specialised languages and contributed to the development of ESP (Irimiea, 2018).

Also, Huthinson and Waters (1987) believed that learning based on purposes and intentions is the right approach to teaching and learning English. Liu and Hu (2021) argue that ESP has moved its focus from register, words and structures to purposes, contexts and interactions. Among scholars who contributed significantly to the

development of ESP are Johns (2013), Upton (2012), Hyland and Shaw (2016), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), to mention only a few.

Zahedpihseh et al. (2017) argued that, recently, ESP has been influenced by the development of communication technologies, which is, consequently, also seen in the methods used in the English language teaching. In recent years, the Internet has become a fundamental and rich source of available data for potential tourists on the one hand, and linguistic research, offering research materials that are original, authentic, up-to-date and topical – also suitable for teaching English - on the other. Among uses of English for Specific Purposes Tourism is definitely one of the most widespread, and English as a Lingua Franca contributes a lot to the tourist context (Wilson, 2018). Especially in non-English speaking countries such as Slovenia, for the Tourism industry professionals, English proficiency is of great importance “for the ethos of a globalised industry” (Hsu, 2014, 50).

Social media and the Internet have an impact on tourism (Narangajavana et al., 2017, 60), and have become the everyday habit of communication (Luo & Zhong, 2015) and search for information. In recent years, they have influenced the tourism industry significantly, “word of mouth has been transformed into word of mouse” (Dann & Parrinello 2007, 12 in Francesconi 2014, 32), and scholars have explored and discussed the migration of the contemporary tourism communication to the web in many of their research works. All this has also influenced teaching English for Tourism. Despite many changes, which have also affected teaching English for Specific Purposes, teachers in this specific area still have the following five major roles:

- 1 Teacher or language consultant,
- 2 Course designer and materials provider,
- 3 Researcher – not just gathering material, but also understanding the nature of the material of the ESP specialism,
- 4 Collaborator – working with subject teachers and subject teaching,
- 5 Evaluator –evaluating the materials and the course design constantly, as well as setting assessment tests and achievement tests (Harding, 2007, 7).

4 Teaching Writing Skills in English for Tourism

When it comes to teaching English for Tourism at the university levels, the communicative approach to learning English is very successful. One of the essential skills for future tourism professionals is communicating in written form. One of the challenges that teachers of English for Tourism face, is teaching writing skills, which are often poorly developed among students, despite the fact that it is agreed that “useful written communication is crucial in the workforce” (O'Halloran, Deale, 2004, 62). Tourists, customers and visitors demand high quality and well-communicated services, professionally communicated products and communication skills, which include not only proper language skills in the mother tongue and in foreign languages, especially in English, but also awareness of cultural place specifics, heritage, literature, history, language specifics, food, terroir, and climate. All these skills are crucial for successful tourism practices, branding and positioning of destinations, attractions, companies and products - for communicating with clients on the one hand, and for presenting products, attractions and developing destination image on the other.

Teaching and learning writing skills is complex, often challenging (Kennedy, 2015), and, thus, writing is very often perceived as a “difficult skill” (Kavaliauskiene, 2010, 21), which requires a lot of time to master (Graham, 2018). Writing is undoubtedly challenging to teach, and always related closely to the reading skill, but various strategies for developing writing skills have been developed, and they help teachers and students in acquiring the English language successfully in writing. Many researchers have written extensively on the subject of acquiring writing skills (Shanahan, 2006; Olinghouse et al., 2015; Bazerman et al., 2017; Graham, 2018). According to Graham (2019, 288), “effective writing instruction involves (a) Writing frequently for real and different purposes; (b) Supporting students as they write; (c) Teaching the needed writing skills, knowledge, and processes; (4) Creating a supportive and motivating writing environment; and (5) Connecting writing, reading, and learning”.

5 Travel Writing

At the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Maribor, travel writing was employed for developing communication skills with an emphasis on writing. To students, travel writing was introduced in the academic year 2019/2020, and the first students' assignments were analysed and developed further (re-written, or improved by observing the teacher's comments) during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic was an additional encouraging factor in employing travel writing as a teaching method for further development of writing skills (and encouraging non-sedentary lifestyle). Namely, during the pandemic, the need for more developed communication skills, especially writing skills, occurred, since the lack of communication skills became even more evident during online teaching (students were asked more often to write some short texts than before). Thus – based on a quick analysis of students' writing skills, an immediate reaction was essential, since – as already mentioned - communicating and writing skills are the core of the Tourism business. If they are developed and enhanced successfully during the undergraduate and postgraduate Tourism studies, this is beneficial not only for the students of Tourism, but in the long run, also for the development of products, services and destinations. Consequently, travel writing, which is a very diverse genre with a long history that has a lot in common with storytelling (another important concept for Tourism students), was introduced to students.

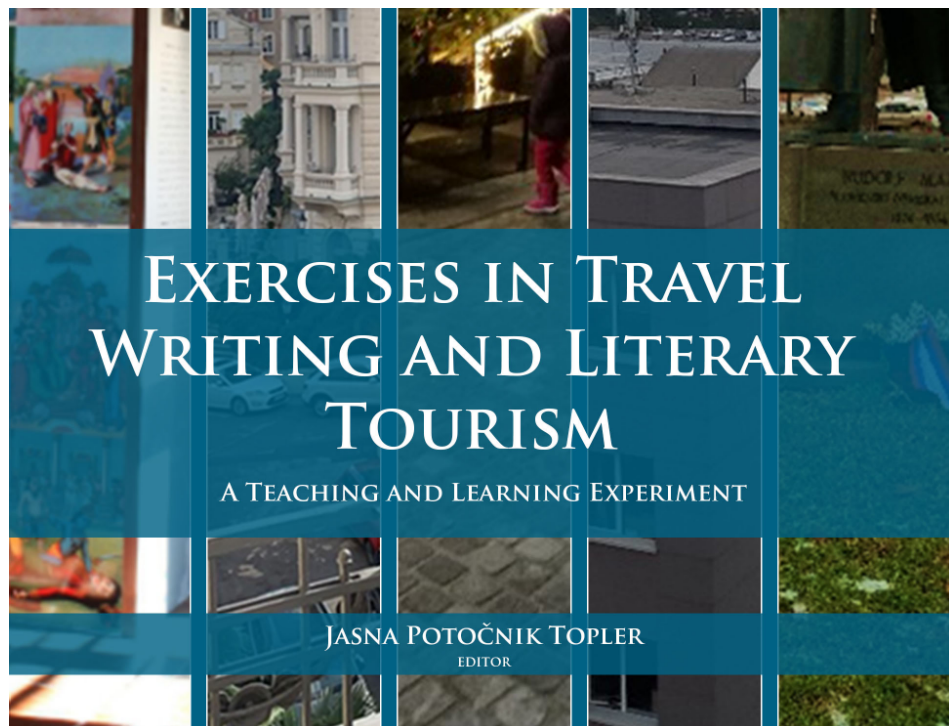


Figure 1: Cover of the e-book Exercises in Travel Writing and Literary Tourism.

Source: <https://press.um.si/index.php/ump/catalog/book/506>

What exactly is travel writing? A longer elaboration would be needed to answer this question properly, but for the purposes of this Chapter, a simplified definition by Robinson (2004, 303), who defined travel writing as “writing about the experience of travel and visits to ‘other’ places”, will be adopted. When employing travel writing in the classroom as a method for encouraging and teaching writing skills, the focus was, obviously, on the writing. Students were acquainted with various narration techniques for tourism (i. e. first-person narration, sensory details, languaging, inclusion of small talks with the locals, humour, etc.), and one of the goals was also encouraging students’ creativity (along with further development of functional, information, and Internet literacy). Travel writing is often discussed as a subtype of Literary Tourism (Busby & Klug, 2001, Gentile & Brown, 2015). Alú and Hill (2018, 1) claim that, in travel writing texts, “views and gazes express a narrative space from which both narrator and reader scrutinise, judge and categorise the varied cultures and societies they explore”. Travel writing can also be associated with the so-called

Slow Tourism or, as Mingazova (2019) puts it, slow travel writing, which is linked to using a slower means of transport, meeting the locals, learning the basics of (foreign) local languages. As far as linguistic choices are concerned, travel writings display a wide selection of structural, lexical and grammatical choices and writing techniques that are never neutral, but are always trying to persuade, influence, attract, direct, or seduce potential tourists to become actual tourists arriving at the destination and buying products and services. The analysis of travel writing texts by Potočnik Topler (2018) confirmed that, by using carefully selected adjectives (keywords), destinations can be represented according to tourists' expectations as beautiful, magical, romantic, lyrical, adventurous, fun, wild, exotic, unspoiled, etc. Depending on what the author of the text tries to achieve, various registers (register of health, register of food and drink, register of nostalgia, eco-tourism, etc.) and Dann's (1996, 101- 134) tourism categories (Dann, 1996, named them as three Rs - Romanticism, Regression, Rebirth, three Hs - Happiness, Hedonism, Helio-centrism, three Fs - Fun, Fantasy, Fairy Tales, and three Ss - Sea, Sex, Socialization, may be employed. By using keywords efficiently (adjectives, adjective-noun collocations, verbs, etc.) that are appealing to tourists, readers really become tourists.

There are many methods available for developing writing skills, but travel writing is a good choice for many reasons. Besides those already mentioned, in the described case at the Faculty of Tourism, travel writing seemed as an appropriate technique and one of the genres most suitable for the students, because Tourism students like travelling or researching the tourism offer – even during staycations (other forms of travelling were impossible during the pandemic). Secondly, it should be pointed out that travel writing can be employed to facilitate many skills, among them (new) media skills and digital technology, which are among the most desirable contemporary skills in newly employed tourism professionals. By employing the digital, new media, new technology, and combining writing with digital platforms, various written texts may contribute successfully to the distinctiveness of tourism products, services and destinations. Yes, travel writing skills can be a valuable addition to tourism graduates' competencies, and, thus, teaching of this genre should be planned carefully (Jiménez, 2001) with specific objectives in mind, and in accordance with the overall Tourism curriculum (professional, Bachelor or Master level).

Due to the travelling component, travel writing is appealing to students, who noticed that travelling has many aspects and meanings, and is, among other things, as Monga (1996) points out, a metaphor for life. In the process of learning and researching during English lessons in various groups of English for Tourism, it turned out that travel writing is not only a tool for branding attractions, products, places and destinations (Mansfield 2017), but also, which students emphasised as significant, a tool for self-exploration (some students mentioned the therapeutic effects of writing) and identity development.

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Figure 2: Table of Contents of the e-book Exercises in Travel Writing and Literary Tourism.

Source: own.

6 Teaching and Learning about Travel Writing

Teaching English for Tourism has some specifics – as teaching English for other Specific Purposes. Pascual (2019), for example, argues that blogs enable innovative ESP methodologies, and travel writing is by all means innovative, since it goes beyond “How I spent my vacations” texts.

That is how travel writing found its way into the English language classrooms at the Faculty of Tourism. At the beginning it was employed for one of the elective tasks, initially in the frame of the MA subject English in Tourism 1, later, also in undergraduate English for Tourism courses. When the task was introduced to students, they were introduced with the basics of Tourism Discourse and Literary Tourism, and, additionally, some examples of travel writing were read (and watched); the book by Charles Mansfield (2019) on travel writing was recommended to them, along with Mansfield's travel writing methods. After this introductory part, which is very important, further instructions on travel writing were given to students, who were offered three possibilities to write, encouraging their own creativity: 1 Practise literary travel writing; 2 Complete a place branding mini-research on the town or area of study, or 3 Students' innovative third possibility if they feel limited by the first two offered options. To students the elective assignment was presented as creative, significant and requiring a responsible approach. That is why it was fundamental to introduce the task to them with a well-planned theoretical intro to travel writing, discourse theories and storytelling, which enabled better understanding of the process and equipped the students with the necessary knowledge, which enabled the self-confidence to take up their own travel writing texts. Despite the fact that in travel writing texts creativity is significant, it is, on the other hand, very important that travel writing maintains credibility by observing some of the requirements, such as: Obtaining reliable information, supporting evidence of what is stated in the text and statements by relevant people (i. e. interviews with the locals). When describing a trip or a walk, Dann's (1996, 68) four sociological models of language usage for (promotional) texts in tourism may be employed: 1) The language of authentication (promotes the experience of the traveller as authentic, genuine, pure, opposing it to the banality of everyday life); 2) The language of differentiation (highlights the contrast between holiday and normal life); 3) The language of recreation (emphasises the recreational and hedonistic side of Tourism); and 4) The language of appropriation (tries to adopt an attitude of

control and domination of what is unknown). In addition, travel writing texts need to be structured carefully, informative within limited space, they should display a careful selection of writing techniques (see Mansfield's *Methods for Travel Writers*, 2019) structural, lexical and grammatical choices. According to Cappelli (2007, 94), the typical itinerary, which may also be a part of the travel writing texts, contains the following sections:

- “- An easily understood title;
- An indication of the geographical location;
- Directions on how to reach this place;
- A mention of the climate;
- A description of any scenic beauty;
- A mention of any archaeological, historical or artistic features;
- Cuisine,
- Accommodation options;
- Sports and entertainment facilities;
- Attractive illustrations;
- Shopping hints;
- Special events;
- Addresses, etc. for obtaining further information”.

Another verbal technique mentioned by Dann (1996) - and very often used in travel writing - is languaging – inserting foreign words in a text to make it more authentic or aimed at a certain niche of tourists. Cappelli (2007) also mentions common collocations, the role of humour and various registers (i. e. nostalgia, health, food and drink, and Eco-tourism,), while Potočnik Topler (2018) points out the irreplaceable role of adjectives. Humour was elaborated on extensively by Pearce (2009), who argued that humour has a vital role in tourism promotional texts and in tourism in general. That humour attracts tourists to destinations was confirmed by Carden (2005), and what is more, humour is an important pulling factor that can lead to better and more enjoyable tourist experiences (Pabel & Pearce, 2019; Pabel & Pearce, 2015; Pearce & Pabel, 2015).

Despite the fact that the focus of the task in the frame of English for Tourism was on the structure, words and narration techniques, it was mentioned during the introductory lessons that images (photos, sketches, maps, receipts, promotional materials, etc.) make travel texts more realistic and authentic. Since the travel writing task was introduced to students at the Faculty of Tourism for the first time, it was given a special name – it was called *Travel Writing -A Teaching and Learning Experiment* because, in fact, the teacher and students experimented with travel writing for the first time and no one really knew what to expect. This teaching and learning experiment was comprised of teaching in the classroom, research work in libraries and at home, field work, a lot of discussion, participation and evaluation, reviews, motivation to be curious, creative and innovative. Besides the very basic theory of Tourism Discourse, the students were acquainted with the methods of travel writing. One of the essential requirements when preparing for field work (in the process of travel writing), is thorough research. By thorough, research in archives and libraries is meant, and, in addition to that, studying maps, interviewing experts, reading literary texts, reviews. In the frame of English for Tourism, there was not enough time for a thorough research (time was a significant limitation).

In the frame of the task, students studied the genre of travel writing, compared styles of different travel writing texts, discussed the effectiveness of different travel writing texts, did individual research, did some walking or travelling, composed their own texts, re-wrote their own texts after receiving the teacher's corrections, and comments by the teacher and/or the students in the group.

The goals of the task were manifold:

- To improve writing skills in English;
- To understand travel writing texts and their role in the media,
- To convey personal experiences eloquently,
- To improve observation skills,
- To create inspiring (also out of the box) texts,
- To recognise and structure a good story, and engage readers,
- To evoke a sense of place,
- To communicate with the Travel industry and get published.



Figure 3: Students working on their travel writing ideas.

Source: own.

7 Analysis of Students' travel writing texts

This travel writing experiment in the frame of the English for Tourism courses turned out to be challenging, but rewarding – this could be said for all the groups involved in the assignments. Students evaluated learning English writing through travel writing as more meaningful, and they pointed out an additional value of broadening their horizons by learning not only about Travel Writing, but also about Tourism Discourse and Literary Tourism. Students were required to do their own research on travel writing, google scientific and professional literature related to the the topic, visit libraries and archives if possible, do some field research, read, and acquire new vocabulary along with the writing and research skills.

In general, the best travel writing texts were written by Master students, whose knowledge of English reaches the highest levels. So, the 2020 Spring learning experiment was concluded by publication of Master students' texts in a book titled *Exercises in Travel Writing and Literary Tourism: A Teaching and Learning Experiment*, which comprises the texts written by 9 students, which represent valuable reading resources, teaching and learning materials and potential social media

contents' ideas. Not all students' texts did involve travel writing or did not follow the instructions, but such writing was allowed, because it was significant not to hinder the creativity of students. Students themselves reported that travelling shaped their travel writing, and that travel writing shaped their travels, as they were travelling with the travel writing text and its goals in minds, which contributed to the improved structure of students' travels, walks and texts.

To sum up, it can be concluded that travel writing proved to be a very encouraging and motivational method in the English for Tourism classroom.

Besides the already mentioned benefits of the travel writing inclusion into the English for Tourism classroom, some additional benefits are the following:

- Learning travel writing techniques,
- Learning English by doing,
- Differentiating between objective and subjective writing,
- Differentiating between information and entertainment in travel writing extracts,
- -Demonstrating evaluation and critical thinking,
- Recognising the cultural and historical importance of travel writing,
- Working individually and in the group,
- Communicating orally in group discussions and in written form in the Travel Writing assignment,
- Developing a creative project and publishing a booklet as a result.

The inclusion of travel writing into the English for Tourism lessons turned out to be beneficial, because travel writing can be used for a variety of purposes. On the one hand, travel writing is a branding tool, and on the other hand, it is a tool for shaping students' writing, language knowledge and identity. In the classroom, travel writing is significant in encouraging curiosity, research, creativity, innovation, reflection and the overall self-development.

Based on the positive experiences, one of the Tourism curricula objectives is also to offer a special Travel Writing module to MA students of Tourism, which would enable students enough time to study and experience the characteristics and benefits of travel writing. The expected impact of the developed Travel Writing module is the actual promotion and usage of a developed travel writing know-how by students as future professionals in Tourism and teachers. Another significant issue when it comes to travel writing texts is how to evaluate them. The following draft evaluation criteria have been established so far in the frame of the Travel Writing project (together with Mansfield):

1. The ability to identify an interesting and definable place(s).
2. The ability to develop a creative response in relation to the place(s), which involves emotional and ethical awareness.
3. The ability to develop a critical attitude towards the place(s), which pushes and tests existing boundaries
4. The ability to add critical reflections and readings (books, newspapers, signs, poems ...)
5. Style of writing, including register and grammar
6. Degree to which the place-writing vignettes communicate successfully with an audience (s).
7. Development of work from an initial concept to final resolution.
8. Originality of the final presentation.
9. Encouraging students to publish.

8 Innovation

Including travel writing assignments into English for Tourism classrooms, developing travel writing assignments and modules in travel writing is innovative, in the sense that it provides innovative approaches and methods for teaching and learning writing and other communication skills in Tourism at Higher Education Institutions. Another important aspect of including travel writing into teaching and learning English for Tourism, is that travel writing enables interdisciplinary learning and researching, since it connects many scientific fields from Destination Management, Geography, Ethnology, Informatics, to Literature and Languages and many other fields. Also, travel writing enables research freedom and encourages active life and creativity, which, consequently, leads to self-development. After the

texts of the described teaching and learning experiment were published – the students had a satisfying feeling of achievement.

9 Conclusion

In the classroom, Travel Writing is significant for developing communication skills, especially writing and reading skills, and for encouraging research, curiosity, innovation, creativity, reflection and the overall self-development. During the 2020 pandemic and lockdowns travel writing was employed successfully as long as at least some walks were allowed. The 2020 experiences in online teaching at the Faculty of Tourism have shown that many Tourism curricula need re-thinking, with new goals, competencies, required knowledge and methods; especially, since the main objective of Tourism Higher Education Institutions is to improve quality, and teach students to create, evaluate and analyse, which are the most important abilities according to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Adams, 2015). Thus, Travel Writing as a teaching and learning method, could be placed into many modules, from English for Tourism and other Specific Purposes to Destination Development and Tourism Marketing, etc. The described case of employing travel writing in English for Tourism confirmed that travel writing is a broad concept. Therefore, it needs to be emphasised that, whenever we discuss travel writing, we discuss not only a creative teaching and learning method, but discourse and its many functions - also discourse as a marketing tool, and as a means with a huge impact on Tourism, encouraging tourists from around the world to consume specific products, services and destinations mentioned in travel writing texts.

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