

**EPISODE 218**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:09] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by the team at OnePitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find and pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at [onepitch.co](http://onepitch.co) to learn more.

Our guests on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Sarah Allard, Digital Director at Condé Nast Traveller. During the episode, Sarah discusses how her role has shifted from writing to strategy and planning, what catches her eye in the travel pitch, the types of stories she helps Condé Nast Traveller tell, and what it's like working with a global journalism team.

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:42] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. We're here to demystify the wonderful world of public relations, specifically media relations. That is why we bring on editors, directors, freelancers, reporters, all the media people we can find and know. In fact, with us today is a digital director recently promoted. Sarah Allard is here. She's the Digital Director now, former the Digital Editor of Condé Nast Traveller. We are so excited, Sarah to be chatting with you. Welcome.

**[0:01:16] SA:** Thank you so much, Beck. Thank you. I'm so excited to be here. I've been looking forward to this.

**[0:01:21] BB:** Yes. We have a fun time here. Real quick, though. You've recently got promoted.

**[0:01:27] SA:** I did.

**[0:01:28] BB:** So you went from Digital Editor to Director. Please demystify this perhaps for people, because even on your LinkedIn right now, it still has the old title, by the way.

**[0:01:38] SA:** I know.

[0:01:39] **BB:** We got to update it.

[0:01:39] **SA:** I'm not very good at LinkedIn, I'm going to say at the beginning.

[0:01:41] **BB:** Me too. It's okay.

[0:01:43] **SA:** It's just terrible. I need to be better.

[0:01:45] **BB:** There's 100 outlets to update all the time. So, yes.

[0:01:48] **SA:** There's too many, Instagram is the most exciting one, I have to say. I'm an Instagram girly. So yes, Digital Director, which is so exciting. I haven't actually said that out loud very much. I'm so excited. So yes, for Condé Nast Traveller UK. I'm really lucky to have the most amazing team. But yes, I'm kind of like still doing what I've been doing. We weren't really globally at Traveller, so I think there's just going to be a lot more of that kind of global work now that I'm in this new promoted role. But yes, it's so good. It's very exciting.

[0:02:17] **BB:** Please, for maybe those who don't know as much, or just to illuminate all of us here. We talk a lot sometimes with, okay, there's quite a difference between being a reporter and being an editor. But now as the director, how would you delineate those roles?

[0:02:35] **SA:** I would say, I mean, to be honest, I don't actually write much at all anymore. I think that my role has become a lot more around kind of strategy and planning. Yes, more of the strategy around like what we're doing at Traveller, which I absolutely love. I work with, not only our own digital team, but I work very closely with the print team, with all of the other global – we have seven markets at Traveller. I work with all the other editors, all the other directors. Yes, just kind of working on those, behind a bigger picture projects and packages that we have at Traveller. So yes, more strategy focused, less of the kind of day-to-day writing, I would say.

[0:03:15] **BB:** Do you miss that though?

**[0:03:16] SA:** I do, yes, I love it. I tried to do bits when I can. Obviously, get to do the odd hotel review, which is very nice.

**[0:03:23] BB:** Which is great, yes.

**[0:03:25] SA:** Which is great. Not going to give those up. But yes, I do miss it. And yes, try to do bits when I can. But the weeks go by so quickly, I can't actually believe we're in May.

**[0:03:35] BB:** Yes, I know. Halfway through the year. Let's back up for a second. Again, I asked this now for pretty much any outlet that comes on, because I want to hear it straight from the horse's mouth, and have you articulate it. What would you say encompasses the coverage for Condé Nast Traveller? Because there's a lot.

**[0:03:54] SA:** There's a lot. We cover so much. I mean, it's everything from travel news, tips, trends. We cover the latest travel gadgets to buy, latest openings. Obviously, that's very important for us. As I mentioned, hotel reviews, that's huge. But I'd say, all of these things, I think they're very important. But as heart, we really like to tell authentic stories about people that are rooted in travel. That could be a feature on how a writer has been able to connect with their heritage and their culture through a particularly meaningful trip. It could be, our trip has had a lasting impact on someone who's going through a big change in their life. So, these people-focused stories are incredibly important to us. Yes, it's just changed so much, even in the two and a half years that I've been at Traveller. Yes, just being on the inside, I mean, for me when I joined, I had no real – it is my first job in travel, actually.

**[0:04:49] BB:** Wow.

**[0:04:50] SA:** Yes. It's been so eye opening. For me, I think, what's been the most incredible thing is just seeing behind the scenes of the incredible work, and the planning, and the thought, and the knowledge that goes into every single story that we wrote. It blows my minds. Across the magazine and the website, the knowledge is incredible, and the team is just amazing, so I'm very lucky.

**[0:05:13] BB:** I think too, similar to when we have more, the lifestyle and the fashion stuff. Yet, travel is a business. There's a lot of things that are not the glamorous things about it. I can only imagine, you see now the innards of how the travel business works, and it's not just like fabulous plushy pillows, and arriving on time in a luxury car. It's all these other things and news.

**[0:05:39] SA:** Absolutely.

**[0:05:40] BB:** Especially post-COVID.

**[0:05:41] SA:** Especially post-COVID. I mean, yes, when I joined is actually just sort of towards the end of COVID.

**[0:05:47] BB:** My God, what a time.

**[0:05:49] SA:** What a time. It was just before that kind of first year of full travel returning, which is kind of great in some ways, because you've got this kind of new opportunity to really look at how people are traveling, people are traveling so differently now. That has been so interesting. There's so many challenges that the industry is facing, obviously. The climate is a huge one.

**[0:06:14] BB:** Yes. I was going to say, tell us what some of those are that you see.

**[0:06:16] SA:** Yes. I mean, we've seen such a shift in the way that people are traveling. I mean, just last year in Europe, with the heat that we saw, and over tourism, as you know, is such a thing. It's been really interesting to see you know how that's already impacting people's travels this year. I think we're going to see a lot more travel to cooler, and more northern European destinations, which is great. It's so exciting to see those like new summer destinations come through. So yes, lots of interesting stuff going on. But you know, it keeps it – yes, it keeps every day fun, and you just don't know what you're going to be up against, so it's good.

**[0:06:54] BB:** Yes. Wow. Okay, Sarah, your inbox these days, how does it look and what's in there?

**[0:07:03] SA:** Oh, Beck. I love this. When I started at Traveller, I didn't actually think that my inbox would be one of my main jobs.

**[0:07:12] BB:** Oh, it is a job.

**[0:07:14] SA:** It's so crazy. It's a lot. I shouldn't complain, because it's full of so much good stuff. But yes, it's definitely been one of the things that I've really had to learn to kind of tackle, and cope with, and figure out. I think I'm getting there, definitely. I've got my assistants that I kind of tried to stick to, but I didn't know – I mean, I was always an inbox zero kind of gal.

**[0:07:38] BB:** Me too. Did that go away?

**[0:07:40] SA:** It did.

**[0:07:42] BB:** Oh, crap.

**[0:07:42] SA:** It has. It's not too bad. I'm probably, I'd say at the moment, I've got about 50 emails in my inbox.

**[0:07:47] BB:** Okay. That's not bad. Okay.

**[0:07:50] SA:** It's not, yes. I'm never going to be one of those people that has that 100,000 unread email.

**[0:07:56] BB:** Oh, and there are those people. Listen, they come on the show too. They just let it ride, and I'm like, "Wow." I couldn't.

**[0:08:05] SA:** Gives me anxiety just thinking about it.

**[0:08:06] BB:** It would give me, oh, oh. I would wither. I would wither. Okay. Then, do you have – now you're not inbox zero, let's say, religiously. But do you have a way in which you manage then, I imagine the Condé Nast Traveller business stuff, the pitches that come in, maybe from

freelancers, your staff, random other pitches. We'll get into that in a second. But, how do you manage that?

**[0:08:31] SA:** I think I just got quite good at kind of spotting what I know is the stuff that I need to read instantly and action instantly. Like, anything from the team.

**[0:08:41] BB:** Yes, immediate.

**[0:08:42] SA:** Immediate kind of, yes, I always read that. Then, I think I just kind of – two and a half years in, I built these relationships with publicists and with freelancers. So, I kind of know who I am kind of looking at, maybe first. Then, if it's not someone I've got a relationship with perhaps, and that's the kind of stuff that might get left for a bit longer. I have my folders, everything has a folder.

**[0:09:06] BB:** Oh, you're a folder lady.

**[0:09:07] SA:** Yes. I'm a folder girl, yes. I basically read it, action it, and as soon as it's actioned, it goes into its folder. So yes, that's kind of how I'm trying to keep on top of it, and keep organized. But obviously, yes, it doesn't always work. But that's what I'm trying to stick to.

[BREAK]

**[0:09:28] ANNOUNCER:** Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn about the unique ways OnePitch helps brands engage with the right journalists? Head to [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

**[0:09:51] BB:** Okay. Let's go into pitches a little bit. What type of pitches are you getting? Are you getting mostly like freelancer pitches or are you getting the publicist pitches? What do you like in pitches, if anything?

**[0:10:03] SA:** Yes, it's a bit of both. We're so lucky we get a lot of amazing freelancers pitch to us. That's how we get loads of our great stories. I would say, in terms of the way we commission, it's probably like 70%-30%. Seventy percent, we kind of actively commissioned. We know we have this destination we want to cover. We know who's in that destination. We know who knows that destination really well and we kind of go to them. Then, we say that kind of 30% those fun, really interesting stories that we haven't planned, we can't write ourselves. So, we kind of save that for those pictures. I get a lot of interest from freelancers, I get a lot of emails from publicists, it's a real mix. I tried to action a lot of them myself. But yes, a lot of them now that I'm a bit strapped for time, I might send those out to the team who I know kind of a best place to kind of answer those emails. So yes, I tried to filter them out a lot as well.

**[0:11:03] BB:** Okay. You're dispatching and going, "Okay. This person here, you do this piece, you could do this piece, et cetera.

**[0:11:09] SA:** Yes. Absolutely. I'd say that we, in the digital team, we have – the team kind of have their own, I guess, pillars that they look after. So yes, our deputy editor, for example, she really focuses on our weddings content, our safari content, our food content, which is just –

**[0:11:26] BB:** Fabulous.

**[0:11:27] SA:** So much of what we do is food related. So, I will kind of pass that, a lot of that to her. Likewise, with our wellness content, our accessibility content, we have another – our senior digital writer, she looks after that. So yes, there's people in the team that I'll automatically send out if it's kind of related. And yes, the system seems to be working. It's good. But we get, as I said, some really great pitches. I do kind of base a lot of what I'm opening and reading first over the subject line. I have to say like, I want a good subject line. It needs to be grabby. We see some not so grabby interesting ones.

**[0:12:05] BB:** Yes. Can we get into that? What's a non-grabby one versus like, "Yes. Good." Because you're saying good, but let's define good.

**[0:12:13] SA:** Yes. I mean, for me, I want to – that subject line, I want to – I want that to be the subject line that you could imagine, is like the newsletter that you're going to open. So, all the social stuff for example. I mean, I got a couple of examples here that I thought I would share.

**[0:12:29] BB:** Oh, bring us examples, yes.

**[0:12:31] SA:** Also, what might be worth mentioning is that, we have these kinds of buzzwords. I mean, this isn't obviously just Condé Nast Traveller, I'm sure lots of other brands see this. But, these buzzwords that we know are going to do so well from our newsletters, some from social and from Google discover. Particularly like secret, undiscovered, [inaudible 0:12:47].

**[0:12:50] BB:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**[0:12:52] SA:** Also like. locals guide to, or insider stuff.

**[0:12:55] BB:** Yes.

**[0:12:58] SA:** That does really well for us. Anything like that in the subject line from a freelancer, I'm like definitely interested in. So, yes, I've got one that was – also put pitch actually in the subject line. I think a lot of people don't do that.

**[0:13:11] BB:** A lot of people don't, because, I think publicists think, "Well, obviously, it is a pitch." But, I find that – so many people have said like, that's helpful, put exclusive, put story idea, put the thing it is, because you're blown through – I don't know how many hundreds of emails a day, sometimes. Looking through what are the quick signals that tell me this is something I need to open.

**[0:13:33] SA:** Absolutely. It's just really like when you're just glancing at your inbox. It just helps you like quickly narrow down what you're looking at. what you need to action, what you need to file, all that stuff. So, yes, I find that really helpful. One I got recently was, "Pitch: Is this Scotland's coolest foodie neighborhood?" I was like, "Oh my God. Yes, tell me." I want to know that kind of thing. I got another one that was, "Pitch. Meet Mexico's female rodeo riders." I just thought, "That's so cool, I love that." Yes, I think I do really appreciate when people put the effort



into the subject line. That does – yes, it really helps me kind of focus on what we're kind of looking at, and what we want to run with. So yes, some of the less good ones, I would say.

**[0:14:24] BB:** Do tell.

**[0:14:25] SA:** A lot of people just put like, "Pitch - Freeze." I'm like, "Okay. I want to know more." "Pitch – Spain." I'm like, "Mm, okay."

**[0:14:31] BB:** Ugh. Ugh.

**[0:14:33] SA:** Not the best.

**[0:14:35] BB:** No.

**[0:14:36] SA:** Then, just sometimes it's like, "Are you commissioning? Some pitches for you. Some ideas for you." Then, it will just be a bullet pointed list of just tons of ideas, which is great, but it's kind of hard to really narrow down the ones that are going to work for us. So yes, I'd say those are a bit more challenging. So yes, I like people to be specific, really kind of hone in on what the idea is.

**[0:15:00] BB:** Okay. Hone in on the idea. Please, people. Sarah, I cannot believe, "Pitch - Spain." No. No. Okay. Disappointing, people. Disappoint. Okay. Sarah, can people build relationships with you? How would they go about that?

**[0:15:20] SA:** Absolutely. I think I actually find it easier when I've met someone in person. So much easier, I feel like it gives me the opportunity to explain the kind of content that works at Traveller, the way that we work as a team, the way we work as a business as well, and how we work with print, and how we work with the other markets. It's just really incredibly helpful. It helps me visualize, if it's a publicist, obviously, it's really good to hear more about their clients. You just get more, I think, in face to face, and you come from a press release. I mean, that's some sort of rocket science, but it definitely helps bring things to life. With a freelancer, it's just really helpful to kind of know a bit more about like their own experience, where their passion

points are, and really kind of like get to grips with where their expertise lies. Then, when the name pops up in your inbox, then it just – everything there just helps.

**[0:16:16] BB:** Yes, you like it. Yes.

**[0:16:18] SA:** Yes, totally. So yes, I'm definitely down for coffees and breakfasts. I think those are my preferred face-to-face situations. So yes, I love it. I love meeting people as much as I can.

**[0:16:31] BB:** Yes. Okay. Just for fun. What are some of your on your list travel destinations?

**[0:16:37] SA:** Oh, gosh.

**[0:16:38] BB:** For you? I mean, you all have the hotlist 2024, of course. We know this, but what about for you?

**[0:16:43] SA:** You know, I've never gone on Safari. That is a real bucket list for me. I'm sure for many people.

**[0:16:51] BB:** It is a stunning thing if you get the chance. My God. Yes. Yes.

**[0:16:56] SA:** I would love to go. Have you been? Where would you [0:16:58] traveler?

**[0:17:01] BB:** Yes, I was in Kenya, and it is truly like the Lion King. I thought, "Oh, you'll have to spend hours in a Jeep or whatever, like trying to find a cheetah with your binoculars." No, there are copious amounts of animals at least the time I went, this is a couple years ago, everywhere, everywhere. It's insane. It is really something.

**[0:17:23] SA:** That's incredible, I've heard. Yes, I have to do it.

**[0:17:26] BB:** It is truly remarkable. I've done other animal-ish things. I've seen gorillas in Uganda. I've been to the Galapagos Islands. I've been to the Amazon stuff. But nothing is like the cornucopia of animals than a safari.

**[0:17:40] SA:** Amazing.

**[0:17:41] BB:** At least to my experience. It's really uncanny. I think just as humans as we are now, you can't understand that wild creatures are all existing like that together. It just kind of blows your mind.

**[0:17:58] SA:** It's so incredible. I think everyone I've ever spoken to has been on Safari, has just said, what a life changing.

**[0:18:04] BB:** Yes. It does something to you. Well, highly recommend, Sarah. I heard you have an editor for that, so you've got some of the copy who just know Safari, so perfect. Okay. Are there any sources, Sarah, that you're really always looking for?

**[0:18:21] SA:** As I mentioned, we do quite a lot of travel tips and hacks, that kind of thing. Works really well for us. So really, it's kind of like travel insiders, and that could be anyone from, I don't know, an air steward, or someone who's just on the kind of business side that has traveled a lot. Those kinds of people that were definitely looking for a lot more of. Anyone that basically who can offer that kind of unique point of view or hack around travel, to be honest, that's really – so yes, the moment I'd say that's a real thing that we're kind of looking for, in terms of sources, yes.

**[0:18:56] BB:** Mm-hmm. Okay. Sarah, we have a quick rapid fire little portion here. Are you ready?

**[0:19:02] SA:** I'm ready. I'm so excited for this.

**[0:19:04] BB:** Video or phone interview?

**[0:19:07] SA:** Phone. I would say phone.

**[0:19:08] BB:** Phone, yes. Bullet points or paragraphs?

**[0:19:12] SA:** I mean, short paragraph. Can I say short?

**[0:19:15] BB:** Yes. Yes, short paragraphs. That answers our next question, which is, short or long pitches? I'm assuming short/

**[0:19:20] SA:** Short, definitely. Keep it punchy. I mean, two ideas maximum in an email is just my ideal.

**[0:19:27] BB:** Two and done. Images attached or a Dropbox zip file.

**[0:19:32] SA:** I'm fine with both. I think Dropbox, you can skip through them. So, maybe Dropbox, I'd say.

**[0:19:38] BB:** Okay. An email or a DM? Maybe on Instagram, because you're on Instagram.

**[0:19:42] SA:** Oh, do you know what? I love Instagram, but it's – that's not a whole lot. I just much prefer email. Otherwise, I lose it and I just want –

**[0:19:51] BB:** Yes, agreed. One follow-up or multiple?

**[0:19:55] SA:** I don't mind people following up. I'd say one. Give it more than a day.

**[0:20:01] BB:** Not two hours.

**[0:20:03] SA:** Yes. Yes. Yes. So yes. I'd say one, maybe two max.

**[0:20:07] BB:** Okay. Direct or creative subject lines? We kind of cover that, but go ahead.

**[0:20:12] SA:** I think – I mean, again, it depends if it's a PR. If it's a PR or publisher, I want it to be direct. If it's a freelancer, I think you'd be creative.

**[0:20:19] BB:** Okay. Press release or media kit?

**[0:20:23] SA:** Press release.

**[0:20:24] BB:** Yes. Time you read pitches if at all.

**[0:20:30] SA:** I mean, honestly, probably all day.

**[0:20:31] BB:** All the time.

**[0:20:31] SA:** But I think first thing in the morning, and then at the end of the day, always a good time. I guess, the middle of the day gets quite busy and hectic. So yes, first thing in the morning is ideal.

**[0:20:43] BB:** Sarah, lastly, is there anything we can promote, tout, celebrate about you?

**[0:20:49] SA:** Well, let me think.

**[0:20:50] BB:** Tell me.

**[0:20:52] SA:** We launched our first ever UK's top new restaurant awards last year, which was so exciting. It's the first time it's ever been done at Traveller, and we're going to be running it again this year. It's yes, a celebration of all the new openings that we've loved and will obviously be [inaudible 0:21:09]. Yes, for the UK. That's something that we're really excited about. We had a big awards party for it in March this year, so we'll be launching that again this year to kind of roll out early next year. That's kind of been my kind of greatest sort of, I guess, achievement. I don't know, just something that I've just really loved working on, and it's just been so much fun.

**[0:21:33] BB:** That's great.

**[0:21:34] SA:** Yes. So yes, I guess I have to say that, because we just – yes, we had such a great time doing it. As I mentioned, food is such a big part of the content that we do. It does so well for us. So yes, the restaurant awards for sure.

**[0:21:48] BB:** The restaurant awards. Well, who doesn't like food, everybody. Come on. Sarah, thank you so much for being on here today. Everyone, this is Sarah Allard. She's now the Digital Director at Condé Nast Traveller. Sarah, thank you again for being on. I hope you get to Safari.

**[0:22:07] SA:** Thank you so much, Beck. Thank you. I'll be coming to you for your tips if I ever do get there.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:22:12] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Sarah Allard, Digital Director at Condé Nast Traveller. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at [onepitch.co/podcast](https://onepitch.co/podcast). We'll see you next week. But until then, start great stories.

[END]