

If You Can Type, You Can Travel and Earn at Your Leisure

By Danielle Ditzian

There I was in Mexico, where I'd always dreamed of living. My new home: the small surf town of Sayulita, north of Puerto Vallarta on Mexico's Pacific coast. I was drawn to Mexico by the easy-going, low-cost lifestyle, and the strong sense of community in Latino cultures. But—without Mexico's work visa—I quickly realized that finding work would be more difficult than I thought. I found myself in need of an income.

That's when it hit me. Years ago, I had worked in a law firm, where I was in charge of all of the transcribing. Transcribing is relatively simple: listen to an audio file through headphones—in this case, it was voice memos recorded by a lawyer—and type them out.

It occurred to me that there had to be people doing this kind of work online. All kinds of people use transcribers. Journalists often record interviews, but simply don't have the time to type them out. PhD and Masters students record interviews for their theses. Folks use transcribers for webinars, conferences, and even television shows. With this idea in mind, I started scouring the internet.

In my old job, I had special transcription equipment, but you only need a laptop, a halfway decent internet connection to download audio files, and basic headphones—I use simple earbuds now. Luckily I had all the equipment I needed with me.

Four years ago, determined to no longer suffer through the freezing-cold Edmonton winters, I had hit the road with just a backpack, a laptop, and the clothes on my back. I spent some time in Australia and New Zealand. But after traveling for a year, the allure of Mexico called me back to the Americas. And now transcription had given me a way to support myself anywhere in the world.

To find transcription work, I mostly use *Upwork*, a freelancing website for all sorts of jobs. To find work, it's important to fill out your profile, highlighting any experience you have. When you're starting out, it's enough to let your prospective clients know that you have excellent spelling and

grammar, or that you type fast. To land your first job, you may need to accept lower pay. This is simply so that you can complete a job and get a positive reference. From then on, scoring jobs at a fair price is far easier.

I typically earn between \$45 and \$90 per audio hour transcribing. On my first project on Upwork I did it for \$10 per audio hour just to get a review.

The drawback of Upwork is that it's competitive, and they take a percentage of your earnings (between 5% and 20% depending on the job). Still, it's not a bad place to start out and to begin building lasting relationships with potential repeat clients.

The other way to find jobs is to work directly with a transcription company, which pays a higher wage. To break into that market, I sat down for a couple of hours, researched all the online transcription companies I could, and sent them my cover letter and resume. While only two companies replied, the pay was more competitive. All I needed was a couple of consistent clients to earn enough to pay for a simple lifestyle and plenty of travel.

When I first started transcribing—both through Upwork and private transcribing companies—I had to do a few test files to prove that I could do the job. To ensure that you're not being taken advantage of, be sure the test files you're transcribing are no longer than 10 minutes long. Take your time on these test files; review them for punctuation, grammar, and spelling. The client doesn't care how long it takes you to review these test tapes. Take your time to get it right and the doors will open for future transcription jobs.

As a transcriber, your pay is directly related to how fast you type. Transcription jobs are paid by the audio hour (the length of the audio file), rather than by the hour worked. The time spent on a transcript is influenced by the audio quality, background



With transcribing, Danielle Ditzian has complete control over her hours. She only works as much as she needs to fund her life of travel and adventure.

noise, the accent of the speaker, and the speed at which people speak.

The average transcriber (who types between 75 and 100 words per minute) will complete one audio hour in four hours worked. I typically complete about one audio hour per day, six days a week, and make about \$1,080 per month—sometimes more.

I'm not living a life of luxury, but it's more than enough to fund my travels. I tend to avoid tourist traps and buy my food at the supermarket. And in many of the overseas countries I travel through, the cost of living is so low, that my dollars go a lot further. So, for me, \$1,080 works just fine—plus, I love those four-hour work days.

You can easily earn more money transcribing by taking on more clients, and working more hours per day. As an online transcriber, I've sailed down the Amazon... camped under the midnight sun in Iceland... and lived in a hut in Laos. I can easily tailor the amount of time I spend working to the country I am in.

Transcribing is the ideal earn-anymore income, allowing you to travel the world. You can dictate your own hours—working only as much as you need and spending the rest of your time on the beach or exploring new and exciting cultures. And all you need is a laptop, an internet connection, and a pair of headphones.