

San Francisco Writers Conference

FOOD & TRAVEL 'Lifestyle' WRITING SESSION

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Tips on How to Write About Your Foodie Travels!

Ideas from the author of *The Maui Onion Cookbook*
& co-author of *Maui Tacos Cookbook and Practice Aloha*

Reality Checklist

- Brainstorm possible stories before you go. Think outside the box. What information are you NOT finding that you need...that is the article that needs to be written.
- Look for what's already been written so you don't write the same old thing.
- Listen to the BUZZZZZZ when you get there. A new restaurant, a fun new food product... If it's new, it may not have been written about yet. Jump on it!
- Who is the buyer for the proposed article? Again, do the research for paying publications. You can always post it to your blog to build traffic. In either case, you need to be professional. Double check facts in the story. Have necessary permissions for photos, etc.
- What are your credentials? You will need to convince readers you are a reliable information source and prove to any publisher you can do the job.
- Will you want/need interviews? Ahhh, YES! Try to arrange them in advance. No one likes an intruder in their business—or restaurant kitchen—when they aren't prepared.
- Do you have the time and resources to devote to the piece? You may need to do research before and after the trip. A chef may have to cancel an interview if he gets a large party coming in for dinner that night. It happens! Sure you want to get the story out while it is fresh. But give yourself plenty of time to have the piece completed by the deadline.

Use Your Senses When You Start Writing

- I have a bulletin board behind my desk where I post my travel photos. I leave mementos around my computer. The menu of the restaurant I'm mentioning, the bamboo swizzle stick from a tropical drink... Yes, it's messy but seeing them reminds me of details I might have forgotten.
- Write to music. While working on the *Maui Tacos Cookbook*, I listened to the Beach Boys (for the 'surf shack' theme) and Santana (for the fire of the food.)
- Funny how yummy scented sunscreen takes me to the beach and brings back memories. If I'm writing about Maui, why would I wear plain old moisturizer?
- You can do a revisit even though you are home. If you are losing the vibe of the place, find an area that reminds you of it. Eat at restaurants that serve the food, even if it isn't 100% authentic!
- Just like any other writer, you have to read a lot, too! Regional food magazines are especially good...I love *Southern Living*. Cooking shows on television expand your cooking and food basics knowledge, too.

Food Writing as a Career

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Remember your audience eats every day. That means:

They are constantly looking for new recipes, restaurant reviews, dining trends and unusual food products. Appeal to the wanderlust in your readers by combining interesting destinations and ethnic food-related topics. Local chefs love the publicity of a well-placed article...perhaps on YOUR food blog with a substantial readership?

There are opportunities all around for writing about food...and making money at it, too.

Newspapers

Articles. This is how I broke into the food writing scene. Newspapers do need fillers and fresh material from outside sources. Query if it is a substantial article. Write and submit articles on locally grown foods or specialty cuisine. They may not pay much, but writing freelance articles for a local newspaper can build your name recognition. Don't submit the same article in the same region at the same time, however.

Dining reviews. A well-written article submitted at the right time could work into a weekly gig. You won't get rich but the perks are fantastic. When I had a column in Kihei, I ate at a new restaurant. The chef recognized me and created a silver platter of seafood to start off my meal!

Dining Magazines

Contact the editor/publisher of dining magazines and pubs with dining sections. Pitch yourself and be prepared with a 'sample' review to show your stuff. As a publication grows they may need reviewers for new editions or to supplement existing reviews.

Want to **create a dining magazine... or a food blog for a client?** If you have the experience, approach a merchant's group or a visitor destination. Pitch the proposed magazine/blog as a marketing tool. Do your homework. Be sure the budget you propose for the project is realistic.

Public Relations for Restaurants and Chefs

I have worked with many restaurants such as Ruby's Diner and Maui Tacos in Hawaii. Ruby's paid me a retainer plus an hourly rate to write press releases, organize their participation in events and consult on the restaurant industry. Maui Taco's creator Mark Ellman and I wrote a book that blends a traditional cookbook with aspects of a marketing piece for the Maui Tacos chain. It's fun for me to think outside the (bento) box to get exposure for a restaurant.

Teach a Class

Your writing is the basis of a **class curriculum**. Teach in your home or a community center. Use a food writing angle or even a cooking demo to share your expertise while building a fan base.

Non-Paying Perks of Food Writing

You will be invited to **participate in food festivals as a semi-celebrity!** Heck, it gets you into exclusive food events and gives you access to MORE chefs and food ideas to write about.

You will be asked to be a **guest judge for food events**. Be forewarned...competition is fierce and some chefs don't take kindly to NOT winning a food competition!

Your food writing reputation can open doors to **exciting 'fam' trips**. Warning: Years ago I had to turn down a luxury all-expenses paid trip to a new resort because I didn't have a passport. (If you want to write about food and travel, you must get a passport!)