

Culture Chat

Read on to find out what Carolyn Bánfalvi, author of the Food and Wine Lover's Guide To Hungary, had to say when FUNZINE caught up with her.

You studied journalism at NYU - did you always want to be a writer?

No, I didn't always want to be a writer. But once I realized I did, I found it to be a perfect fit for me, especially once I started focusing on food. And then it became even more fun.

What was your first journalism job? How was it?

I've always worked freelance, and I can't imagine doing it any other way.

How did you come to focus on gastronomy?

Writing about food is so interesting because you're not just writing about what you are putting in your mouth, but about the whole back story of the food and the culture that surrounds it.

What brought you to Hungary from the USA?

I moved to Hungary because I was dating a Hungarian guy, who I am now married to. Luckily I adapt well, so I liked the challenge of being exposed to all of Hungary's differences and quirks (most of them, anyway).

How did your fascination with food develop?

I had always been interested in food, but that interest deepened when I moved to Hungary and was suddenly exposed to all kinds of new ingredients and dishes, as well as different attitudes towards cooking and eating. I basically got my education in Hungarian cuisine in my Hungarian mother-in-law's kitchen and at her table. She is a fantastic cook, and her cooking, as

well as shopping at the markets and visiting the wine regions, really inspired me.

You received a degree in professional cooking and baking in 2002. Did you take the course with the sole intention of becoming a food critic?

I've always loved to cook, experiment in the kitchen and read and talk about cooking. When I decided to go to culinary school, I definitely did not have the intention of becoming a chef. But I did know that I wanted to be in food, and writing about it seemed like the perfect (and most logical) option for me.

What inspired 'The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary'?

I always use culinary guidebooks when I travel, and there was not one devoted to Hungary. Also, I had been slowly gathering lots of information, knowledge, and contacts on Hungarian food and drink, and wanted to share it. And, really I just wanted to keep doing all of the fun (and tasty) research! High points were eating and drinking many good things, and meeting all of the winemakers in the countryside. I can think of a few pretty bad meals that I ate (in the name of research) that were low points.

Do you have a favorite restaurant in Budapest?

I have lots of them, but I would have to count Klassz, Bock Bisztró, and Wang Mester Konyhája among my favorites. A newish restaurant that I have high hopes for (and am looking



Picture courtesy of George Konkoly-Thege

forward to sampling again) is 21 Magyar Vendéglő.

What is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you while dining in Hungary?

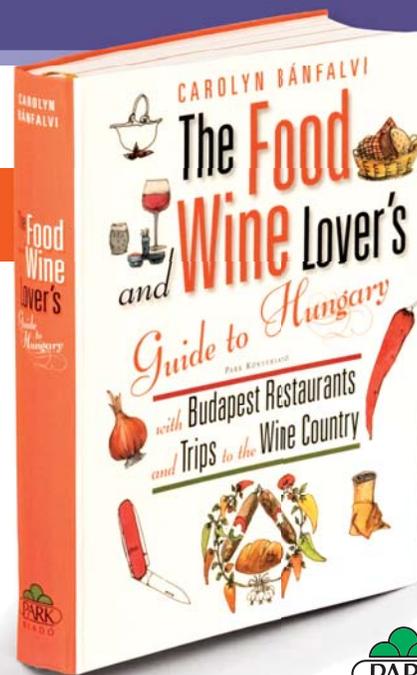
There was one incident that happened when an American friend and I were having lunch. We ordered soup, so the waiter brought us bread. My friend asked for butter, which isn't normally served with bread in Hungary. But instead of just bringing out some butter, the waiter went into a lengthy explanation of why she shouldn't have butter with her bread!

What has been your proudest moment to date?

Professionally, it has been completing my book, seeing it published, and having it acknowledged by winning one award and being nominated for another. Personally, it has been watching my two daughters grow.

What are your hopes for the future?

I have several more book ideas that I'd like to find the time to work on, and which I hope will be realized. I also hope that my daughters will continue to be such good eaters!



Over 11 chapters Bánfalvi waxes lyrical on every aspect of Hungarian gastronomy, and indeed gastronomy in Hungary. All you have to do is walk up Váci Street or Andrásy Avenue and you are bombarded with tantalizing wafts of cuisine; Hungarian, fusion or otherwise. This book will help you sift out the steak from the sausage, making life that little bit easier.

The first chapter, 'Hungarian Food', covers more or less every Hungarian favorite in 50 pages. From pig killing to Túró Rudi, Bánfalvi sheds light on local foods with characteristic charm and a vat of extensive research. The 'Fact and Myth' sections are particularly interesting: "Hungarian food isn't all about paprika," don't you know?

The restaurant reviews are spread over two chapters: 'Hungarian Restaurants' and 'International Restaurants' (the latter covering anything from Azerbaijani to Indonesian to vegetarian cuisine). The chapter preceding it, 'Restaurant Basics', covers all those questions you have when you first dine out in Hungary: etiquette, when to eat, prices, the bill and so forth. It also contains a nifty 'Restaurant Translator'. Bánfalvi has visited every restaurant and café mentioned in the book, and describes each one in terms of food and wine quality, service, price, location and of course offers all the relevant contact details.

Aside from the extensive restaurant reviews, the book also covers food and wine shops, local markets, top breakfast spots, ingredients and dishes and an introduction to

The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary

By Carolyn Bánfalvi

Thank goodness someone has finally done it. Hungarians are so passionate about their food and wine: tourists and expats want to be passionate about Hungarian food and wine. But with so much choice and temptation, it's hard to know where to start. Carolyn Bánfalvi is a journalist, culinary school graduate and a gastro-angel; her sizeable book 'The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary' is an intelligent, detailed and honest culinary guide to Hungary.

Hungarian wine as well as other local drinks. One of my favorite sections, 'Visiting the Wine Country,' offers essential information on the Hungarian wine regions— perfect inspiration for a wine-tasting mini-break! To top it all, there's an extensive Hungarian culinary dictionary – meaning that you'll have all the vocabulary you need to navigate your way around a complex Magyar menu.

You'll be impressed and once you've bought a copy, I guarantee that you won't book a meal out without consulting it first (I don't!).

Joanna Singleton

WIN WIN WIN!

For your chance to win a copy of this fantastic book just send your answer to the following question to win@funzine.hu by May 5th, typing "Food Book" in the subject line.

Name one chapter of 'The Food and Wine Lover's Guide to Hungary'.

WIN WIN WIN!