



TRANSCRIPCIÓN ORIGINAL DE STUDIO OCHENTA

HOW NO TO TRAVEL - EPISODE 3 - CROISSANT

00:00 KIONA

You get a million dollars.

00:02 LUIS

In butter.

00:04 KIONA

In butter. Yeah.

00:06 KIONA

Hi, this is Kiona.

00:09 LUIS

And this is Luis.

00:10 KIONA

And we're your host of How Not to Travel Podcast Season 3.

00:14 LUIS

Fasten your seat belts and take your seat at the table.

00:17 KIONA

In this season, we're traveling around the world from our dinner tables to see how cultural exchange contributed to some of the world's most famous foods.

00:26 LUIS

This week croissants.

00:30 KIONA

I think you should try this weak one first.

00:32 LUIS

Let's try it. Let's see. All right. Okay.

00:38 KIONA

What is our verdict?

00:40 LUIS

Buttery.

00:44 KIONA

All right, we just tried these amazing croissants, but where do we get them?

00:48 LUIS

So we got them at Mille de Lise, which is a French bakery here in Monterrey. That I really like. I've been a loyal customer for a few years now. And that's where we got our croissants.

01:00 KIONA

And would you say it's like easy to find croissants in Mexico?

01:02 LUIS

It's definitely not too hard, especially because many bakeries carry some form of a croissant. It'll probably not be the same as a French croissant or a European one. But it's definitely a popular enough type of bread here.

01:18 KIONA

Yeah. So what in your opinion makes a good croissant?

01:22 LUIS

You know, I've never been someone who's like an enormously huge fan of croissants. For example, I'm not super picky on what it should or shouldn't have. I like it when it's slightly sweet, but not too sweet, definitely.

01:38 KIONA

Yeah. I like it when it's then and flaky.

01:40 LUIS

Yeah. The flakiness is also an important element.

01:44 KIONA

Yeah, totally. So I don't really eat croissants that much because of the high-caloric intake. What is the ingredient in the croissant that you think contributes to the high calories and croissants?

01:56 LUIS

The first thing I would say is probably the same as any sort of bread, which is flour. But I don't know if that's the whole story.

02:04 KIONA

Definitely flour contributes a lot of calories, but also the butter, which is basically the crooks of the entire croissant history. And did you know that croissant is not even French?

02:18 LUIS

But like it's a French word and everything, right?

02:20 KIONA

It's a French word and everything and we'll get into it.

02:22 LUIS

Wow. So like the most stereotypically French bread, maybe apart from a baguette, is not French?

02:29 KIONA

No, although maybe French would argue that it is.

02:32 LUIS

Yeah, I'm sure they would. But tell me more then.

02:35 KIONA

Okay, so firstly, we cannot have croissants without butter, which takes us to 8,000 BC. In ancient Africa, a thirsty herder had been walking all day with sheep's milk, strapped to his animal. And you know, it was jostling around all day long. It was hot, he was tired, and so when the herder went to drink his milk, the liquid had turned into a solid. And that is what we call butter today.

03:05 LUIS

It's like accidental fermentation.

03:07 KIONA

Yes, exactly. And it was because this man was traveling with milk.

03:12 LUIS

Did you know that butter is far from the only food whose origin story has a happy accident? It's not uncommon for products that age or ferment to have a fortuitous story about how they came to be. One of my favorite examples of this is gorgonzola cheese. Legend has it that an Italian cheese maker in the Middle Ages added fresh curds to a vat and left it open overnight. Because he was in a rush to meet his lover, he forgot about it, and later tried to fix the issue by adding more fresh curds. He was then surprised to find a bluish mold growing on the cheese a few months later. He tasted it, loved it, and thus one of the world's most beloved cheeses was born.

04:01 KIONA

From there, butter went on to be developed into different flavors, having different salt content added to it. But from there, butter made its way to Europe where it was integrated into baking. Actually, it was used for a lot of strange things. Like the king of Norway demanded taxes get paid in butter. He loved it so much.

04:22 LUIS

That's amazing. I've always loved stories of being able to pay your taxes with things other than money. I mean, this is just going slightly off topic, but in the early years of the US, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson used to pay their taxes in hemp.

04:39 KIONA

That's so crazy, because hemp is definitely illegal.

04:43 LUIS

Yeah, exactly. But it wasn't the case all the time. But anyway, this of course isn't about hemp, but I just wanted to add that because it's such a fun little fact.

04:52 KIONA

Paying taxes in different currencies. So once it land in Europe, the butter gets put into baked goods, right? Well, legend has it that in 1683, when a baker who was up baking early in the morning, because you know, bakers wake up pretty early.

05:09 LUIS

Oh, yeah.

05:10 KIONA

Don't attract people, make up at like 3am, 4am. He was baking in the morning in Vienna, and he heard the Turks from the Ottoman Empire tunneling underneath the city and sounded the alarm. And Austria won. To mark Austria's victory over the powerful Ottoman Turks, the bakers made crescent moon shaped cookies to mimic that of the crescent moon in the Turkish flag and called it Kipferl. And Kipferl means crescent in German. So what is the word for crescent in French?

05:41 LUIS

Croscent?

05:42 KIONA

Yes, exactly. You get a million dollars.

05:46 LUIS

In butter.

05:47 KIONA

In butter. Yeah. My great aunt told me the story. By the way, one day we were baking our vanilla Kipferl cookies that we always bake during Christmas. By the way, she's Austrian. And it is something that she passed down like this is a marking of the Austrian victory over the Turks many years ago, and they fought many wars against each other. It's just one of the wars that they fought. And it's my favorite cookie ever in Austria. So I am a big vanilla Kipferl fan. But after doing further research, that is just a story.

06:24 LUIS

Oh, it's not true?

06:26 KIONA

No, actually the Kipferl existed long before the Ottomans came to Austria, even being referenced back in the 13th century. So I don't know how I'm going to break it to her that she's lying.

06:38 LUIS

Or at least was misinformed somehow.

06:40 KIONA

Exactly. I mean, everybody loves to hear legends, but legends aren't always based in truth. But it is very likely that the crescent shape of the bread came from the actual moon. And it was used as a pagan offering to the goddess of the moon.

06:54 LUIS

So then this bread shaped like the moon was made as an offering to the goddess?

07:01 KIONA

Yeah, exactly. We can kind of look at bread offerings in Mexico during the "day of the dead". It's definitely part of the ceremonial practices of indigenous peoples that start there and then it develops into something else.

07:15 LUIS

I had never thought that 'Pan de Muerto', which is the bread made during the day of the dead season. And croissants had anything in common. But wow, that plus the sugar in the butter, of course.

07:28 KIONA

Yeah. The croissant, although it's a French word, is actually Austrian and origin. But actually in Austria, if you ask for a keep filled, no one is going to hand you a croissant. It's more like a cookie. So it's thick. But I know a cookie isn't really what you think of when you think of a croissant, right?

07:47 LUIS

And how big is it, the cookie?

07:49 KIONA

They're really, really small. I mean...

07:49 LUIS

Llike an Oreo?

07:52 KIONA

Yeah, it's like the size of an Oreo and just shape a moon shape. But yeah, at some point, the curple came to France and it turned into a puffed pastry. And this is also steeped in myth. So how you ever heard of Marie Antoinette?

08:07 LUIS

Oh, yeah, of course.

08:08 KIONA

So Marie Antoinette is Austrian and she married the king of France. Well, the myth is that Marie Antoinette missed her Viennese pastry so much that she had it brought to France. But you know, since she's the Kim Kardashian of her time, we definitely would have known that it was her and it would have been a newspaper everywhere.

08:28 LUIS

And it isn't.

08:29 KIONA

No, in fact, the croissant was mentioned nowhere. Not for over 50 years after Marie Antoinette was beheaded, did the croissant start to be mentioned and historians trace it back to, again, an Austrian.

08:41 LUIS

Okay, so it was a different Austrian then?

08:43 KIONA

Yes, living in France. And his name was August. August opened the first ever Viennese pastry store in Paris. And then from there, pasted a special steam oven that left his bread shining. And you know, the French flocked for this famous Viennese wreath as the French call baked goods from Vienna.

09:03 LUIS

So the French at this time are like loving these beautiful little breads that are also tasty.

09:08 KIONA

Exactly. Actually, what makes the croissant distinctly French is August sold his bakery and moved back to Austria. And from there, a ton of imitation shops popped up everywhere. And it was only then that the French added yeast to the bread. And the bread lifted, becoming the fluffy pastries today.

09:30 LUIS

Did you know that a croissant isn't automatically good just because you bought it in France?

Obviously, France prides itself on having the world's best croissants. But that doesn't mean you can find those at every Boulangerie and Patisserie. Some businesses work with pre-frozen industrial dough, which can still yield a good product, but doesn't compare to the quality of an artisanal croissant made from scratch. The shops that do offer them, fortunately, carry the label Boulanger de France, which certifies that all bread and pastries are made with the specific ingredients allowed, the correct salt level in the dough, and the proper kneading technique.

10:13 KIONA

So do you feel like the croissant is French or Austrian?

10:17 LUIS

This has suddenly become very hard to answer because, you know, while we were talking about all of this, I had always imagined it as being this fluffy pastries. But now that you mentioned that it was only then that the French added the yeast to it, that's the moment when it gets its distinctive fluffy texture and fluffiness.

10:37 KIONA

French vibe, yeah.

10:38 LUIS

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so, okay, so I guess I didn't invent it, but they added that last element. I don't know if it's the last element, and there might be other surprises here, but at least this latest element that made it like a modern day croissant, right?

10:53 KIONA

Right, exactly. But you know what the crazy part of all of this is? The name croissant means crescent, and the French are obsessed with butter, but the croissants that are crushed and shaped are actually made with margarine. Did you ever notice that some croissants are straight?

11:09 LUIS

Yeah, yeah.

11:10 KIONA

So there's like a whole French law that demands that croissants that are made with butter can be straight, but if any other fat is used, it must be a different shape.

11:18 LUIS

Okay, so that's why some croissants are shaped like a long or a bread and others are curved.

11:24 KIONA

Yes, exactly. It's kind of like warning labels, FDA labels back in the day, but they just did it with shapes.

11:32 LUIS

I guess you were just expected to know what each one had?

11:36 KIONA

Yeah, I guess when it became a law, like people knew, for me, the hypocritical part of all of this is, is that the French were the ones who pushed for the invention of margarine.

11:46 LUIS

Okay, so like famously butter loving French people pushed for the invention of margarine.

11:52 KIONA

Yes, Napoleon III called for a butter alternative for his French army during the Franco-Prussian War because it was easier to spread. I mean, it was cold, so butter was so hard.

12:05 LUIS

So it has a military purpose then?

12:07 KIONA

Yes, from there, bakers were required to separate which ones were butter and which ones were margarine. So if you look at our croissants now, are they made with butter or margarine?

12:18 LUIS

I mean, if they're sticking to the law, I don't know if it's still a law actually, but if it isn't, at least it's probably still a tradition, right?

12:27 KIONA

Yes.

12:28 LUIS

These are longer shaped, straight, so I assume they're made with butter. And when I tasted them, they definitely have that buttery.

12:35 KIONA

They're definitely flaky and really, really good. Basically, if it wasn't for the moon goddess or the Viennese bakers or the African sheep herder or the French imitators or Napoleon III, we would never have the delicious croissant that we have today.

12:54 LUIS

Did you know that the croissant has been the inspiration behind all sorts of fusion pastries? Among them, the cronut? This delightfully named baked good debuted in 2013 in New York, more specifically in the bakery of renowned French pastry chef Dominique Ansel, known for his inventive desserts, many of which go viral, Ansel decided to join two iconic pastries, combining the dough and layering method of the croissant with the shape and deep frying technique used to make donuts. They're so popular, in fact, that Ansel's bakery runs out of them virtually every day before noon, with crowds of people waiting hours for their own. Now the cronut is arguably the most famous croissant-based fusion, but there are others worth mentioning, mainly the crangle, the cropp cake, the croffle, and my personal favorite: the croncha.

13:54 LUIS

I've genuinely learned so much today. Like, I didn't know the different shapes and I didn't know that, like, it meant that they were made with a different product, right? Because we associate them with butter so much. So do you know more about margarine? Because I'm sort of interested in knowing more about that, considering that the French invented it for military purposes.

14:15 KIONA

Yeah, so margarine was invented by a French chemist in 1869, when fats and oils were scarce in Western Europe, as we discussed due to the war. And it was originally an extract from animal fat, but today, margarine is mostly made from vegetable oils, including corn, sunflower, soy, and safflower. In addition to that, margarine is very easily softened, so it's really, really easy to spread.

And on top of that, it actually contains no less than 80% edible fat. And actually, today, many margarine products contain less total fat, saturated fat, and no trans fat, as compared to early margarines and even butter.

14:57 LUIS

So that's like a common way to make a reduced fat version of a product.

15:02 KIONA

Yeah, I guess we could say that the crescent shaped croissants are low fat croissants, but maybe not low fat, but lower fat.

15:08 LUIS

Yeah, they're not exactly light. So it was a military invention, like for easier transportation and storage while at war.

15:19 KIONA

Yeah, all of this kind of revolved around war, if you think about it, from the shape to the battles to, you know, how margarine was invented. These are all pushed by need due to human conflict.

15:36 LUIS

There's need because of scarcity, but also the bread as a symbol of triumph and victory. So are you more of a butter person or a margarine person?

15:48 KIONA

I'm definitely a butter person. What about you?

15:51 LUIS

Yeah, me too. It's fun because I grew up eating margarine more precisely because it was a lower fat version. But then ever since I discovered that butter was better in my opinion, I just switched to butter.

16:04 KIONA

It's definitely more natural as a lot of things in margarine are synthetic.

16:08 LUIS

Also, it's just much more flavorful, I think. I'm sure there are different forms of margarine, but...

16:13 KIONA

Yeah, no. I can definitely taste the difference. And I definitely can tell the difference in spread. It's really hard to spread butter when it's cold.

16:19 LUIS

Yeah, and also for cooking, I don't know. I just prefer it.

16:22 KIONA

Yeah, and baking. I just could not imagine using margarine.

16:25 LUIS

I don't know. I've never tried it though. But I mean, if it's good enough for the French army, I don't see why not.

16:36 KIONA

And that's it for this episode.

16:38 LUIS

If you're still hungry for more, stick around and listen to our other episodes this season.

16:44 LUIS

Now not to travel is produced by Studio Ochenta and hosted by Dr. Kiona and me, Luis Lopez. Our executive producer is Lory Martinez. Production and sound design by me and Chiara Santella. Our production coordinator is Catalina Hoyos and our social media manager is Sofia Rodriguez. You can follow us on Instagram at @hownottotravelpod and at @ochentapodcasts. You can also find us on Twitter at @OchentaPodcasts and on TikTok at @studioochenta. Read more about the show and about our other productions on our website: ochentastudio.com. Thanks for listening and good provecho.