



TRANSCRIPCIÓN ORIGINAL DE STUDIO OCHENTA

HOW NO TO TRAVEL - EPISODE 7 - BARBECUE

00:00 KIONA

Older women want to feed you until you die.

00:07 KIONA

Hi, this is Kiona.

00:08 LUIS

And this is Luis.

00:09 KIONA

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

00:13 LUIS

Fasten your seatbelts and take your seat at the table.

00:16 KIONA

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

00:25 LUIS

This week, barbecue.

00:30 KIONA

I see that you brought barbacoa tacos today.

00:33 LUIS

We're recording this in Monterrey in my hometown. And this city is well known throughout all of Mexico as capital de la carne asada, so grilled meat.

And it also has a tradition of eating barbacoa, taquitos de barbacoa, especially on Sundays.

00:54 KIONA

Today happens to be Sunday, so they're lucky day.

00:57 LUIS

We just got some barbacoa tacos. We got them at a really nice puestecito de tacos. Do you want to describe it a little bit?

01:04 KIONA

Yeah, so plastic chairs.

01:07 LUIS

Yeah.

01:08 KIONA

Plastic plate or what we have here is styrofoam. I love it when the señora who's cooking is cooking with her bare hands. I don't want any gloves. You have to cook with your bare hands. Even better, she's handling money with her bare hands and then stuffing it in her bra. To me, those are the best tacos. So I'm excited to try. But also, I know you said carne asada means grilled meat.

01:31 LUIS

Yes.

01:32 KIONA

Do you know what barbacoa means?

01:34 LUIS

Barbacoa is a very interesting word. It actually comes from the Arawak language of the indigenous, Taino, Caribbean people. The original word is barbaca. And that word refers to the wooden structure that is used to hold the meat over a fire.

01:55 KIONA

So is barbacoa a derivative of barbaca? And does that also tie to barbecue?

02:04 LUIS

It does. They all share the same origin. And they actually ended up referring to very different methods of cooking, but they all have to do with exposing meat to open flame or to, you know, very direct heat from flame.

02:19 KIONA

But how, I guess we're going to get into this, but how did the Caribbean arawak people end up in Mexico? Or I guess at least their method of cooking?

02:29 LUIS

I did want to go back a little bit before we go into the history just to talk about how barbacoa can refer to a lot of different things. So on the one hand, you can talk about grilled meat, like really grilling a steak on the grill or something like that. But it can also refer to, especially when we talk about barbacoa in Spanish, to methods of cooking that aren't over a grill, but rather usually slow cooked underground. At least that's the more traditional way of doing it. Barbacoa, we call it; "barbacoa de pozo". So like "pit barbecue", that allows the meat to like develop a very smoky taste. And it's also cooking slowly so it becomes very, very tender.

03:10 KIONA

So I'm originally from Hawaii or Hawaii. And that's actually how we do luos. So luos started when one of the Hawaiian kings decided to start eating with women. And previously women and men never shared meals together. And when you got rid of that rule, luos started like a big party. They're like big cookouts. And I never would have, I guess, considered them barbacuse, but it is now that you mentioned like a pit under the ground. The food at those cookouts are traditional Hawaiian foods. And my favorite part actually is the earth oven. It's called an imu, where you basically dig a hole, put hot stones under the ground, put your meat, it's usually pig or fish because it's in island, and some

vegetables. You wrap your meal in taro leaves or luau. And the stone ground oven is uncovered by banana leaf.

04:01 KIONA

Did you know that you've probably been using the word luau a little wrong your entire life? Everyone knows that a luau is a big feast, right? Well, actually the word luau is a misnomer. Luau refers to the leaf of the taro plant served at these big events. The correct word is paina, which means a gathering of people for the purpose of dining in a celebratory way. In other words, a party. Of course, simply by way of usage, most people will probably understand you better if you say luau than if you say paina. But it might be cool to mention this when you go on your next luau. I mean paina.

04:48 KIONA

So is that kind of what you guys do here too?

04:51 LUIS

Yeah, at least traditionally, to be honest, like most places where you would get barbacoa these days wouldn't do that whole thing because it requires a lot of time and like a lot of space to have this pit underground or everything. But you can definitely still get that especially in more rural areas or places that still traditionally cook that way. You know, now that you mentioned the luau, I really like that because it's so interesting how in a place that I've never been to in a culture that isn't mine, I still would feel very much at home there and something like that.

05:21 KIONA

When I think of barbacoa or a luau, it's very community oriented. In luau, you are killing an entire pig and there's no way you could eat one by yourself. You have to eat it with other people. And so I just think it's cool maybe the development of going from community oriented and that still exists.

05:42 LUIS

This method of cooking at least traditionally really could only be done with the whole animal or at least a big chunk of the animal. To this day we still have a particular type of barbacoa which is called "barbacoa de cabeza" in which you actually put the entire cow's head underground. And you cook the whole thing underground. And so that meat tends to be particularly tender. It's interesting how this technique historically requires the whole animal because it doesn't make much sense to make a whole fire to just cook like a steak or something like that. You would need to cook the whole thing and then bring the whole community together.

06:22 KIONA

It's very community oriented but I'm wondering if as we have a personal barbacoa individual method, do you feel like it's taking the community part out of it? Or do you feel like you still eat barbacoa tacos together in community?

06:38 LUIS

Definitely the cooking methods have changed and now it's a lot easier to make barbacoa on your own. And like a slow cooker or something like that and you can definitely get a very similar result. But I think that for example here we have barbacoa los domingos. So "Sunday barbacoa", so that's still sort of like a very in our tradition, a very Sunday food.

07:02 KIONA

Yeah and I guess like Sundays are traditionally like for family so you would eat them together.

07:07 LUIS

Exactly.

07:08 KIONA

It kind of reminds me when I go on Sundays usually actually with my grandma, well my grandma that's Korean from South Korea. And we go to eat Korean barbacoa. And have you had Korean barbacoa? What did you think?

07:24 LUIS

I don't think I've ever had a full Korean barbacoa experience which I know is like a whole thing. So I'd love to know more about it.

07:32 KIONA

So it's usually you sit in a big booth, there's a grill in the middle, so you cook your own food, your own meat.

07:39 LUIS

Oh nice.

07:40 KIONA

Yeah the servers just keep bringing you more meat. It's like buffet style and in my culture and I'm sure in your culture. What we call oljimas are like the older women want to feed you until you die. And it's like when my friends come with my grandmother they're like this was so amazing until it was miserable because I cannot eat anymore. And my grandmother judges everyone like if you don't eat enough meat she is judging you.

08:11 LUIS

I think that's a universal thing right because it happens a lot here too. It's like an older Mexican lady is like a Mexican Abuelita would be like judging you if you don't, if you don't ask for like a second helping of posole or something like that. Even though posole for example is a very heavy dish.

08:28 KIONA

Yeah it's already big like I can't eat anymore.

08:31 LUIS

Exactly. It's so funny because like you would say you know the abuelita would say like would you like some more and you'd be like no thank you and abuelita would be like: "No te gustó entonces...".

08:41 KIONA

Yeah you're like she takes that personally like it's her own cooking.

08:44 LUIS

Yeah and you're like no I loved it and that's why I've had enough.

08:47 KIONA

Yeah exactly. Well it's similar in Korean barbecue and that they just keep bringing more and not only that there's this thing called banchan.

08:57 LUIS

Uh huh.

08:58 KIONA

Where it's very small plates of vegetables and it changes with the season so it's not always the same. And they also just keep bringing out more banchan. Actually Korean barbecue can't be traced back to the first ever humans by any means. But it is a pretty old tradition going back to 30 BC.

09:20 LUIS

Okay yeah.

09:21 KIONA

Actually the meat being grilled over the fire is called bulgogi which means fire meat.

09:26 LUIS

Oh, okay I heard that word before but I didn't know what it meant.

09:29 KIONA

Yeah, kind of like what the arrow wax called barbecue. I actually saw this TikTok, that was a Mexican person trying Korean barbecue for the first time and he brought his own tortillas. And he was like a pastable bulgogi weight and I just thought it was like the perfect cultural mix of you know adding your own spin to another culture but like it being very similar to your own.

09:54 LUIS

BYOT you know "Bring Your Own Tortillas" to this like yeah this is the way to do it.

Oh I love it now I want to try that.

10:01 KIONA

Yeah it's me too actually I was like man that's not a bad addition. Again like I said you eat Korean barbecue by having a grill in the middle of the table and having meat brought out that you cook together as a family or community. And then you have a whole bunch of side dishes all around called banchan and they're usually vegetables. Well we almost lost the tradition of Korean barbecue when Buddhism came to Korea. And actually Buddhism banned meat eating for over 600 years which is why banchan was developed in the first place to flood the table with vegetables. But actually when the Mongols came they took over and they brought meat back with them.

So you know the Mongols actually introduced Korean barbecue back to us. And then the Japanese colonized and there were huge meat shortages so the tradition left again and didn't come back until the 90s.

10:51 LUIS

So very recently.

10:53 KIONA

So Koreans really had to fight to keep their Korean barbecue which is why it's such a it's like a sacred thing for us. Like we don't go every day especially since meat isn't a huge part of our diet probably due to the Buddhist. But we definitely do it on special occasions like if somebody graduated or on a Sunday or if somebody's visiting. And you know for us my mom is always the person that cooks the on the grill or my grandmother and she serves us all. But when I think about grilling in the United States like I see it as a very masculine thing.

11:30 KIONA

Did you know that the tradition of men working in the grill is really only about a hundred years old? In many cultures all around Asia and Latin America it was women who performed the task of cooking meat over a fire. It was only after sub urbanization in the 20th century that grilling was popularized as

quote unquote manly thing. As a single family home became more popular in the United States so did the family backyard and with it the backyard grill. And the role of cooking meat outdoors was marketed as masculine for a few reasons. It's quote unquote "dangerous" because it involves fire. It provides other men a form of entertainment as they can watch someone else grill. And perhaps most importantly it's a cooking method that doesn't require a lot of cleaning.

12:26 KIONA

I have a question. Where are the original arrow locks you know anything about how they cooked?

12:31 LUIS

They also cooked in a very communal way of course right so like everyone had a role in preparing different parts of the animal and in preparing and lighting the fire. And you know preparing the structure and everything. And once the Europeans arrived they took a lot of those methods of cooking with them and not only of course there in the Caribbean islands but also to the US and then to Mexico and to South America Central America as well. And so this method of cooking really became widespread across the Americas right in general.

13:07 KIONA

So how did an ancient Caribbean form of cooking eventually become such an American staple? I mean you explained that the Europeans came and brought it but like what made it so popular?

13:19 LUIS

Europeans discovered how much they liked the taste of the meat when it's prepared this way because of course we know that cooking meat on a grill or cooking it underground gives it a very smoky flavor. And so they brought it with them and they started preparing things that way. And then another undeniable fact is that slavery was a big part of why it's so popular because a lot of the tasks that revolved around cooking were done by the enslaved people.

So there's actually a very important black and indigenous tradition and origin to barbecue in the US. And I think it's really important to highlight it right because unfortunately it's suffered from a lot of erasure especially as we picture the typical barbecue on a Sunday and what you picture is like white nuclear family in the suburbs and the dad is grilling and the kids are playing in the backyard. And you have this image of like this white dad grilling right and so what I think is important to remember is that a lot of these techniques have these origins. So on the one hand the indigenous route is very important not only in the arrow wax tradition in the Taino tradition but also in Native Americans who introduced ingredients such as corn, beans, spices and chilies. Which of course all eventually you know became a part of the sauces and just the methods of cooking.

14:51 KIONA

Yeah so like a Native American bonchon.

14:53 LUIS

Yes, exactly. I hadn't thought of it that way but exactly. And then of course black people were also the ones who very often made these foods and so they were the ones who developed a very particular seasoning that we know today as barbecue. And in fact what we see today for example commercially sold as barbecue sauce is actually like a very mass produced version of those original sort of sweet flavors of barbecue that would... that would be commonly used in in this type of cooking by black people.

15:27 KIONA

Now that you mentioned that the best barbecue I've ever had in the United States was in Tennessee and it was by an African American chef. And he had the best smoked ribs ever and I don't even like pork but I ate everything on my plate.

15:42 LUIS

Yeah.

15:43 KIONA

It's just so interesting that the started in Latin America traveled via the Europeans. Then the Native Americans had their own techniques and then they passed that on to and saved black people that came and then those people added their own thing to it. And now it's like a very fourth of July tradition in the United States. Unfortunately during fourth of July neither black nor natives nor Latinos really were free at that time.

16:11 LUIS

Right. Yeah.

16:12 KIONA

And so it's just kind of a weird hypocritical juxtaposition of yeah we do cookouts on July 4th but really like not everyone was free on July 4th our Independence Day.

16:22 LUIS

I found this quote from an article from today.com that I really that I think really encompasses all of this, which is that you know Europeans saw the ways that Native Americans cooked meat and basically you know modified the methods to create what eventually became pit barbecue. And then because of racism in society in a huge chunk of American history there were only a few occupations that black people could do without generating white resentment and one of those was cooking.

One of the few occupations that offered more than just survival and where you could actually prosper as a cook right because of all of these methods and because that was something that also was very welcome in society at that time.

17:03 KIONA

Well I guess we could say that barbecue is a cooking method that contains the history of human beings like back to fire invention.

17:11 LUIS

Yeah.

17:12 KIONA

Until "Carne asada"... It talks about colonization sharing feminism and it brings us all together at the end of the day like it's bringing us together as a community.

17:23 LUIS

Exactly.

17:26 KIONA

Did you know that grilled meat tastes so delicious because of science?

If you like to cook you've probably heard the term 'maillard reaction'. It was first described by French chemist Luis Camille may art and it describes a very particular type of browning and foods.

For example when a steak is cooked at a high temperature such as on a grill sugars and proteins interact in a whole bunch of different chemical reactions creating new flavors and aromas. That's why not all cooking methods are the same and that steak won't taste the same at all if it's boiled. The reaction is super complex so much so that scientists are still discovering every single thing that happens during the process. But fortunately we don't have to fully understand it to enjoy it.

18:16 KIONA
Let's try these tacos.

18:18 LUIS
Let's try them.

18:22 KIONA
We'll be very cool. The salsa is everything.

18:27 LUIS
So what do you think?

18:29 KIONA
It's so tender like it's melting in my mouth I don't even have to chew it really.

18:34 LUIS
Yeah it's super super tender very soft.

18:36 KIONA
Also the flour tortilla is something very of Monterrey.

18:40 LUIS
Yeah and of northern Mexico.

18:42 KIONA
Yeah, northern Mexico, I usually eat my tacos corn with two tortillas because they're so thin. But this is one tortilla wrapped in flour and it tastes delicious.

18:53 LUIS
A lot of people think that flour tortillas are more of an American like a U.S. thing and I mean it's certainly true in a lot of Mexican communities along you know the Southwest especially. But they're definitely also a tradition in northern Mexico.

19:06 KIONA
But I think so there's definitely onions and cilantro and the salsa made out of...

19:14 LUIS
Some sort of green chilis and tomatillo which is like the small green tomato so...

19:19 KIONA
So I feel like this is banchan in a taco.

19:23 LUIS
Yeah.

19:30 KIONA
And that's it for this episode.

19:32 LUIS
If you're still hungry for more stick around and listen to our other episodes this season.

19:38 CRÉDITOS

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.