

STREET FOODS

HINNERK VON BARGEN

THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA



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Photography by Francesco Tonelli



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P R E F A C E

“Every day, somewhere on the globe, embers are readied to roast eggplants and peppers; cooks shape fresh pasta into little ears and long noodles; garlic and ginger sizzle as they hit the surface of hot woks; fish is sliced for ceviche; fresh tamales are carefully packed into steamers; tapas, mezze, and antipasti platters are stacked high; meats are skewered and rubbed with spice mixtures; old metal tables are wiped clean; and the lights are turned on in night markets from Chiang Mai to Marrakech anticipating hungry crowds. It’s SHOWTIME in the world of food!”

— GREG DRESCHER

THESE WERE THE OPENING REMARKS OF GREG DRESCHER, vice president of strategic initiatives and industry leadership, at the 2009 Worlds of Flavor International Conference focusing on street food at The Culinary Institute of America’s Greystone campus.

Street food, in the past often ignored, looked down upon, or even ridiculed by many culinary professionals, has moved into the epicurean spotlight. Operators of food trucks use the latest technology and social networking to inform their devout followers of upcoming specials and locations. Recreational and even business travelers are looking for exciting and original hawker centers instead of the hottest, newest fine-dining restaurant. And classical street foods and their creative interpretations have made their way onto the menus of critically acclaimed eateries. The playing field has been leveled; outdoor culinary professionals, who create, prepare, and serve exciting meals in casual settings, receive acknowledgment for their contributions, just like their star-studded restaurant counterparts.

Globalization, the media, international travel, and trade have broadened most people’s culinary horizons; they have sparked a genuine desire to also explore street food beyond the local palate. Formerly unknown international classics such as *bánh mì*, *pad thai*, Turkish water *börek*, *sincronizada*, and *falafel* have become familiar and are met with comfort, and sometimes with the confident knowledge of where to find the best one.

Today, many dishes transcend geopolitical borders. Tacos filled with Korean beef and kimchi, Spam sushi, seafood hot dogs with creamy savoy cabbage, and Indian chai with tapioca bubbles are standing witness that chefs and customers alike are on the constant lookout for new ideas and inquisitively experimenting with novel combinations.

The objective of *Street Foods* is to offer a new look at food served out of trucks, booths, and mobile vending stations. The aim is to recodify established classics and introduce new creations. The almost 250 recipes are selected and sorted by main ingredient and serving

style rather than by ethnicity or regional background. When the recipes were chosen and edited, authenticity was not always the main factor. In interviews, street-food vendors and international food-service experts made it very clear that concerns about food safety and practicality and the local tastes take priority over authenticity. All food vendors agreed, however, that just like quality and taste, the dish's culinary integrity should not be compromised. There are many versions and interpretations of a burger, a panino, falafel, and other street-food classics, but the key elements of these dishes need to be honored and maintained.

CHAPTER 1, WHAT IS STREET FOOD?, further explores these topics by establishing a working definition of street food and looking at the history of the evolution of street food. It outlines the categories of street foods that the recipes are divided into and tells the reader how to prepare, transport, and serve street food. Additionally, the chapter looks at the different flavor profiles for street foods from around the world by discussing the dishes, ingredients, and tools from the countries represented in the book.

Chapters 2 through 6 contain the recipes for the book and are organized by ingredient category, such as Meat and Poultry or Vegetables. Each of the recipe chapters contains additional text about techniques that are used and ingredient-specific information for creating street-food dishes.

CHAPTER 2, MEAT & POULTRY, discusses the fundamental cooking techniques for meat and how they can be adapted for an environment where street food is being prepared. There are also charts that identify the best types of meat for each cooking method.

CHAPTER 3, FISH & SEAFOOD, offers tips and charts on the best ways to cook fish and seafood.

CHAPTER 4, VEGETABLES, includes information about how to properly store vegetables and a table that breaks down the methods for vegetable cookery and the most appropriate vegetables for each method.

CHAPTER 5, GRAINS, LEGUMES, NOODLES, & BREAD, tackles a big segment of street foods in its coverage of grains, pasta, noodles, and bread. Each category has its own table that offers information about the characteristics and applications for preparation of each ingredient.

CHAPTER 6, SWEETS & BEVERAGES, gives the reader an overview of the street-food approach to sweets and drinks from around the world.

The recipes are written with a culinary professional or well-versed food enthusiast in mind, providing inspiration and guidance through the wonderful world of casual street-food dining.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Street Foods offers an **Instructor's Manual**, including a **Test Bank** to help instructors who are designing courses based around healthy menu items.

A password-protected Instructor Book Companion Web site (www.wiley.com/college/CIA) provides access to the online **Instructor's Manual** and the text-specific teaching resources. The **PowerPoint lecture slides** are also available on the website for download.



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To my friend Chris Dunn and his wife, Nissa, culinary and articulate geniuses, thank you for your guidance through the world of written words and the best currywurst ever.

Of course, I have to thank my friends and colleagues all across the globe. I would love to name each one of you in appreciation for the active and passive mentoring, coaching, and priceless inspiration. So many have touched my life and career that I am afraid I cannot name them all without forgetting somebody. Special thanks, however, to a few of my friends: Chefs Robert Danhi, Parvinder Bali, Marco Brüsweiler, Dereck Brown, Elizabeth Johnson, and Iliana de la Vega. Each one of you is a walking and breathing encyclopedia. I am grateful for your generosity with your time, knowledge, and recipes. Our conversations have been eye-opening and encouraging.

Last but not least, I need to thank all the devoted culinarians who hit the road every day, rain or shine, and actually do the work. Researching for this book has helped me tolerate my weakness and simply give in to tasty snacks on the go. It is nice to have endless excuses to indulge in my favorite hobby—eating street food from all over the world.

Thank you to you all,
Hinnerk von Barga



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HINNERK VON BARGEN is a professor of culinary arts at The Culinary Institute of America, San Antonio, Texas. Since joining the CIA faculty in 1999, Chef von Bargen has been teaching various culinary arts courses in the associate's degree program and continuing education for culinary professionals at the college's campuses in Hyde Park and San Antonio. A Certified Hospitality Educator (CHE), Chef von Bargen holds a Master Chef certificate from the Hotel School in Hamburg, Germany. He completed two apprenticeships in his native Germany before beginning his professional career, which has included chef positions in hotels and restaurants in Germany, South Africa, and China.

Founded in 1946, **The Culinary Institute of America** is an independent, not-for-profit college offering associate's and bachelor's degrees with majors in culinary arts, baking and pastry arts, and culinary science, as well as certificate programs in culinary arts and wine and beverage studies. As the world's premier culinary college, the CIA provides thought leadership in the areas of health and wellness, sustainability, and world cuisines and cultures through research and conferences. The CIA has a network of 45,000 alumni that includes industry leaders such as Grant Achatz, Anthony Bourdain, Roy Choi, Cat Cora, Dan Coudreaut, Steve Ells, Johnny Iuzzini, Charlie Palmer, and Roy Yamaguchi. The CIA also offers courses for professionals and enthusiasts, as well as consulting services in support of innovation for the food-service and hospitality industry. The college has campuses in Hyde Park, New York; St. Helena, California; San Antonio, Texas; and Singapore.



Photography by Alessa Ammeter



WHAT IS STREET FOOD?

Str^{ee}t food is a loosely coined expression to describe snacks or whole meals prepared and sold from a non-permanent structure, mainly for immediate consumption. Trucks or carts, small booths in public places, or floating markets are the most common venues.

Served swiftly on sticks; in bowls; on plates; or wrapped in flatbread, lettuce, or paper, street food is inexpensive, convenient, and portable, ideal for a mobile, on-the-go lifestyle or for a quick economical meal.

Different from fast food, street food is perceived to be based on local, seasonal, fresh, and minimally processed ingredients. Many street-food stands represent the local cuisine with its most common ingredients. Typically prepared by independent vendors who specialize in very few dishes, street food is seen as a true and authentic reflection of a culture and its cuisine. There might be some truth to that: A successful native vendor selling chicken and beef satays from his mobile grill in Kuala Lumpur has had his whole career and life to perfect and personalize it. On the other hand, there are many street-food favorites with little relation to the culinary classics of the locale. Introduced by the media, travelers, or migrants, these specialties have secured a definite place in the hearts and stomachs of the people. A popular street food in the Puebla region of Mexico is the *taco Árabe*, or “Arab-style taco,” filled with meat sliced from an upright rotisserie that most would recognize as Gyros (see page 98) or shawarma. To this day a reflection of Middle Eastern cooking, it has over time given in to local interpretations. The traditional mutton has changed to pork, some vendors use tortillas instead of the traditional pita bread, and the yogurt or tahini sauce has been replaced with regional salsas. A comparable version, known as *taco al pastor*, made its way into Mexico City in the early 1970s and is now found all over Mexico.

Sometimes the introduction of a single ingredient has a massive impact on a street-food culture. Brought to Hawaii as part of U.S. military rations, Spam, a relatively inexpensive canned meat product, has left its mark on the islands. Hawaiian cuisine, known for its unique combination of East Asian, Polynesian, and European flavors and culinary practices, has embraced Spam in many ways. Omnipresent on restaurant menus as well as at street-food stands, it can be found paired with rice as a sushi variation, deep-fried like tempura, or as a simple grilled Spam steak.

Street food can be found anywhere sufficiently large groups of people have settled, but it is more widespread in less-developed countries. Small dwellings with very basic cooking spaces lead to an active life outside the home. Residents of industrialized regions, however, are rediscovering street food as part of a contemporary lifestyle and as an inexpensive opportunity to explore exotic and new food items, or simply to enjoy familiar comfort food.

Many cultures serve and consume street food as a snack or small meal for quick nourishment. In other regions, it is the main meal. Residents of East and Southeast Asia have embraced street food as a way of life; meals are often social events with friends, family, or even strangers who happen to share one of the communal tables. Singapore

especially, with its unparalleled passion for food, has become a world-renowned gastronomic-travel destination for its risk-free street food. All small food vendors are located in hawker centers under the supervision of a public health inspector. These hawker centers are found everywhere, including in public housing developments, major subway stations, open-air pavilions, and climate-controlled shopping centers, where they are called food courts.

THE HISTORY OF STREET FOOD

Throughout history, food for the common people has been produced and consumed as a communal affair. Retreating to one's private quarters to eat a meal alone or in a very small group is a relatively recent development, found mostly in industrialized regions. Interestingly, many cultures struggle to understand the importance of privacy in the western world. In some other languages, the word *privacy* actually has a negative connotation, often associated with isolation or exclusion.

In the cities and towns of ancient civilizations, food was hawked in public places. The majority of urban dwellings during that time did not have a kitchen, and most food was purchased already prepared. Trajan's Market, inaugurated in Rome in 113 c.e., consisted of administrative offices and shops selling cheeses, fresh meats, wine, or prepared dishes. To ensure food safety and wholesomeness, the food distribution to and from this market was overseen by a sophisticated system of government-appointed health inspectors. Today, the ruins of this market are a major tourist attraction, often referred to as Rome's oldest shopping mall.

During medieval times, street food was sold at fairs, tournaments, and other large gatherings throughout settlements and cities. Peddlers used pushcarts to sell stews, porridges, and baked goods. Over time, food became more sophisticated, and with the onset of industrialization came the need to safely cater to the rapidly growing population of the expanding cities, giving rise to today's strict food-safety regulations.

In many cultures, settlements have commonly been built around a communal cooking place. In European villages of the past, this would have been a large brick oven. When the baker finished baking his bread, the residents would use the residual heat of this public oven to cook their stews or bake their cakes. Many traditional dishes have their origins in these collective kitchens. *Bäckeoffe*, literally translated as *baker's oven*, is an Alsatian meat stew cooked in an earthenware dish with a tight-fitting lid. Traditionally, the lid is sealed with bread dough before baking, to retain as much of the moisture as possible. In Brazilian cuisine, a similar technique is applied to a dish known as *barreado*, a meat and vegetable stew cooked slowly for up to 15 hours in a clay pot sealed with a manioc paste. The word *chowder* is derived from "cauldron," a big metal pot used to cook large amounts of soup or stew for a crowd.

Communal cooking and eating arrangements are still common practice in many less-developed regions. Helping to use resources effectively, such shared kitchens also serve as a meeting place and provide opportunities for the villagers to socialize, enjoy some small talk, and exchange news.

Collective kitchens and canteens have even been part of political movements. During China's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, some local governments called for the dismantling and elimination of all household kitchens. All meals for the residents of the towns or villages would be catered at public commons. The objective was to create a more proficiently working food supply as well as to boost the nation's steel production by melting all iron and steel gathered from the kitchens. Even though the initiative was abandoned very quickly, this segment of Chinese history left a distinct mark on the country's culinary landscape. Today known as Revolutionary Cuisine, this style, featuring dishes and recipes prepared with the simplest ingredients and methods, is looked back upon with some sense of nostalgia.

Our universal desire to explore and conquer has also contributed to the development and evolution of mobile catering. In military field-mess units or on ships, crowds of hungry soldiers, warriors, and sailors had to be fed with the simplest means. Over time, this food has evolved from a lucky meal of a freshly killed animal cooked over an open fire to nourishing rations prepared in well-equipped mobile field kitchens.

Today's variety of street food has expanded immensely; a pulled pork sandwich might be served in a steamed bun and feature Chinese BBQ. Crispy sliced French bread is offered with a variety of toppings as "bruschetta to go." And in an effort to combine good food with a show, a rendition of macaroni and cheese is browned with a massive blowtorch. The gloves are off; dishes that in the past would never have been associated with street food are now common fare on food trucks. As the competition grows, vendors are coming up with increasingly creative ideas. Culinaricians continue to educate themselves to keep up with the ever-shifting culinary landscape.

The tables have turned. The business of peddling street food no longer suggests that other attempts have failed; undertaken with passion, ingenuity, and skill, it has progressed into an attractive career choice for culinary professionals and in some cases leads to a whole fleet of food trucks or a well-established storefront business.

PREPARING, TRANSPORTING, AND SERVING STREET FOOD

Hypothetically, anything can be served as street food. However, limited resources at the site, local and state food-safety regulations, and transportability concerns curb the diversity of mobile menus. Street food is simple: Produce, seafood, or meat tossed in a sauce or dressing, or quickly assembled wraps and sandwiches, are popular cold items.

Among hot dishes, soups, stews, braises, grain pilafs, and hot cereals are all characterized by their capability to be held hot for extended periods. Other hot foods include dishes that can be cooked with simple means, such as deep-fried, stir-fried, or grilled foods.

The casual atmosphere and environment of street food is one of the appealing aspects for many patrons. However, uncontrollable ambient temperatures require close monitoring of serving and holding temperatures. Approved food trucks are sufficiently equipped to fulfill current food-safety requirements. In less advanced settings with limited or no electricity, cold holding is accomplished with portable coolers and refreezable gel packs or ice blankets. Hot holding is most easily achieved with slow cookers, electric water baths, or sturdy pots on portable induction burners. In the absence of electricity, portable gas burners are an alternative for cooking, holding, or reheating. However, wind gusts might extinguish the flame, resulting in potential fire and safety hazards. And, depending on local regulations, the use of open flames might require the approval of the fire department.

Required permits and licenses for mobile food vending depend on local and state regulations. In most cases, a mobile vending permit from local authorities and a state food-manufacturing license need to be obtained. Additionally, an inspected and approved commercial pantry or kitchen is required for all preparatory work and storage of the food; in most cases, the vending site, the food truck, or a home kitchen do not qualify. When choosing a location for the food truck or vending site, zoning and parking restrictions need to be considered. Often, local regulations will not allow public vending in close proximity to restaurants or other food-service operations. In recent years, local zoning rules began to designate areas where food trucks could come together, comparable to a food court or hawker center. Often teasingly referred to as trailer parks, these privately managed locations offer public restrooms and sometimes an approved prep kitchen for hourly or daily rent for the food-truck operators.

CATEGORIES OF STREET FOOD

BOWL FOODS

Bowl foods have evolved from communal feeding situations in which everybody helped himself to a portion from a large pot of stew. Serving food in bowls is a quick way to satisfy the hunger of a large crowd of waiting guests. Most dishes served in bowls, such as BBQ Hominy Stew (page 289), Tomato-Braised Cauliflower (page 194), or Black Bean Soup (page 267) are held hot and can be swiftly served into a bowl or onto a plate. Dishes such as the Salad of Bean Starch Sheets (page 269) or Stir-Fried Shredded Flatbread (page 290) require some last-minute cooking or final assembly.

In advanced mobile food-service settings with the possibility of ware washing, reusable plastic or ceramic vessels are sometimes used. To lower the risk of cross contamination

and breakage, however, most street-food operators prefer to serve their food on disposable serving ware.

FOODS ON A STICK

Foods on a stick have their origins with nomadic tribes or traveling warriors who would place their food onto swords or wild branches and cook over an open fire. Today, it is the convenience factor and the casual appeal that make these dishes so attractive to the customer. Many culinary cultures include diced meat, seafood, or vegetables threaded on wooden or metal skewers. In some cases, the meat or seafood is ground, allowing for the use of trimmings and less desirable cuts. Usually, the objective with skewered items is to cook them quickly with minimal equipment and energy. Traditional kebob or satay grills, which have no grill racks and are only about 6 in/18 cm wide, suspend the skewer a few inches above a small amount of hot charcoal. This way, the food cooks rapidly with minimal loss of heat. Additionally, the narrow grill allows enough space for the meat to cook over intense heat, creating bold seared and charred flavors without burning the wooden skewers. Some prominent examples are the Turkish Shish Kebob (page 88) and the Chicken Köfte Kebob (page 79).

Other savory foods served on sticks include Corn Dogs (page 103), Grilled Corn on the Cob (page 212), and the Pakora Fried Vegetable Skewer (page 214). Here, the skewer serves as a vehicle of serving and eating rather than as a cooking tool. Similarly, most popular sweet street foods on a stick are skewered for convenience of eating. Fried Bananas in Manioc Crust (page 357), ice pops, cotton candy, and fresh fruits dipped in a sugary glaze are some sweet favorites.

Skewers are made from a variety of materials. For its convenience, biodegradability, and sustainable production methods, bamboo is a popular choice among many mobile vendors. Metal skewers, commonly made from stainless steel, are valued for their durability, resistance to extreme heat on grills, and in some cases, their design. Their high price and food-safety concerns, on the other hand, often make them less suitable for mobile food-service environments.

BREAD, STUFFED FOODS, AND SANDWICHES

Parched or baked grains, in one form or another, have been a principal food source for millennia. The first breads were based on coarsely crushed grains and water; unleavened and dense, these cakes probably resembled dried-out cereals. Over time, these cakes developed into today's classical breads. Unleavened breads include Corn Tortillas (page 279) from Mexico and Chapati Bread (page 115) from India. Among the leavened breads, Caribbean Roti Bread with Guyanese Filling (page 102) and Pita Bread (page 111) from the Middle East are favorites.

In many regions, bread is served as the main item as part of a salad or it is accompanied by a dip, such as pita bread with Hummus (page 322) or baba ghanoush in the Middle East. In Singapore or Malaysia, the flaky Roti Prata (page 110) with curry gravy is a popular breakfast.

In many other instances, the bread is the vehicle for a filling or topping. Dishes like this include sandwiches, Mexican *sincronizada*, *Bruschetta* (pages 301–304), and many others.

FINGER FOODS

Finger foods, as the name suggests, are meant to be enjoyed without the help of any cutlery. For much of mankind's history, and in some cultures to this day, food has been eaten without utensils. In many cases, finger foods are thought of as small snacks, served as hors d'oeuvres, appetizers, or something to share rather than a main meal. Commonly two- or three-bite items that are crispy or dry on the outside, most finger foods can easily be held between the thumb and two fingers and can be enjoyed cleanly. Technically, sandwiches also fall under this category, but they generally represent a whole meal and are therefore not considered finger foods. Classical finger food examples are *Chicken Flautas* (page 99) from Mexico, *French Fries* (page 177), *Vietnamese or Chinese Crispy Spring Rolls* (pages 105 and 106), and *fried Plantain Fritters* (page 237) from Puerto Rico.

SWEETS AND BEVERAGES

Mostly eaten as a feel-good snack, reward, or refreshment, sweet street food is found all over the world. In most cultures, a family trip to the zoo, the beach, or amusement park is accompanied by something sweet, and not only for the little ones. Most parents also know that a good helping of ice cream, a candied apple, or cotton candy can expedite the drying of children's tears or help to mediate young siblings' squabbles. Sweets are simply the sometimes guilty pleasures we all like to indulge in from time to time.

Frequently, sweet street foods are part of a celebration or regional or seasonal event. *Beignets* (page 358) or funnel cakes seem to be compulsory snacks at county fairs in the United States. At Christmas fairs in Europe, especially Germany and Austria, *Quark Fritters* (page 360) are an omnipresent snack.

Many cultures serve hot sweet dishes for breakfast. In Thailand, *Black Rice Pudding with Coconut Milk and Dried Mango* (page 343) is a much-appreciated boost of energy during the morning hours. And in China, *Spicy or Sweet Soft Tofu* (page 280) and *Plain or curdled Soy Milk* (page 275) are popular breakfast dishes.

Many cultures have distinct beverages, traditionally served on the go. American children dream of raising some funds with a lemonade stand. In the Middle East and Central and South Asia, yogurt drinks are very popular; Indian cuisine is famous for its *Mango Lassi* (page 365), a sweet mango smoothie. Slightly salted yogurt drinks, known as salty lassi in India or *Ayran* in Turkey, serve as thirst quenchers on blistering hot days, with benefits comparable to isotonic sports drinks.

Alcoholic beverages such as mulled hard cider or red wine, served outdoors during cold winter months, are designed to help people to stay warm. A hot *Tea Punch* (page 378), known as *Jagertee* in Austria, is popular among hikers and skiers after a cold winter day in the Alpine woods, as it truly helps to warm up the body.