

Chef Roger Mooking's guide to seeking out the best food wherever you go

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Chef Roger Mooking hosts Man Fire Food on the Cooking Channel.

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Food lovers know that one of the most challenging parts of planning a trip is determining where to invest the calories. It's easy to spend hours – if not days – poring over Yelp, TripAdvisor and Google reviews, then scrutinizing menus and Michelin recommendations to determine the best return on – let's call it – ingestment.

For some expert advice on how to pick the best restaurants when travelling, The Globe enlisted the help of celebrity chef Roger Mooking, host of the Cooking Channel foodie travelogue *Man Fire Food*. Mooking, a George Brown graduate who has lived in Toronto since he was 18, circles the globe to discover (and share through his shows) the world's best culinary experiences. Who better to get some guidance from to help us avoid those tourist traps?

FIRST STEPS

When I'm planning a trip, I'll do some research online. One thing I do that's really effective and simple is Google “off the beaten track ...” with the city or neighbourhood. That's it. It's foolproof and I've got to tell you, you take the time to read or glance through some of that stuff and you'll start to find out some interesting stories. You'll discover different places – or even local names for different areas – that are away from major attractions. You'll often find the staples or go-to spots in that community and that's where I want to go.

Then I'll build off of that. If there are people that I know that have been to that particular place, I'll hit them up and ask them what is dope in that area. Then I'll add that to the mix and start to get a rough idea. Then once I get there, I'll just make a decision, and say yeah, let's go walk in that direction.

ABOUT ONLINE REVIEWS

I think you have to take that information with a grain of salt. I don't really believe the top 10 per cent of it and I don't really believe the bottom 10 per cent, either. Somewhere in the middle, there are some facts and you have to discover what they are. That's the information that you use.

GET ADVICE ON THE GROUND

I usually just ask around. You go to the little coffee shop and ask a person there for recommendations. They know different things about the community. I talk to various people – locals – and it's amazing how quickly you find out the vibe of the neighbourhood. Just by talking to a few people who are from there, you figure out the lay of the land really quickly.

HOW TO SPOT A TOURIST TRAP

If you see a lot of cash exchanges around – places that exchange money or currency – that’s when you know you’re in a touristy area. That’s a red flag. At that point, you keep walking. Sometimes a great non-touristy restaurant is only a block or two away, but it might feel like a completely different planet.

KEEP NOTES

When I travel around these cities, I make different lists. So for New Orleans, for instance, I have a list of 10-15 really good restaurants as go-tos from my experience. I keep this personal database, which I think is a bit unusual. But when people ask me about restaurant recommendations in a city, I give them my list.

POUND THE PAVEMENT

You can learn a lot about a city by walking around instead of driving. Pick a direction. Just say “we’re going to go in this direction today and walk for hours.” As you walk, you’ll discover things. Then you run into things like, “Oh, there’s the Louvre” and things on the must-do list. Just walk and you’ll naturally go to cool places – as long as it’s safe.

In Dhaka, Bangladesh, we were on a break from filming and I ended up having jhalmuri; it’s an Indian street food that’s amazing. This guy makes this with puffed rice, mixes it up with all of these spices, onions, tomatoes, chickpeas with some curry oil. He was right where we happened to be. There was a lineup of people fresh out of school, so I decided to follow their lead and try it, and it was incredible.

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