



Feeding a Yen: Savoring Local Specialties, from Kansas City to Cuzco

Calvin Trillin

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Calvin Trillin has never been a champion of the “continental cuisine” palaces he used to refer to as La Maison de la Casa House—nor of their successors, the trendy spots he calls “sleepy-time restaurants, where everything is served on a bed of something else.” What he treasures is the superb local specialty. And he will go anywhere to find one.

As it happens, some of Trillin’s favorite dishes—pimientos de Padrón in northern Spain, for instance, or pan bagnat in Nice or posole in New Mexico—can’t be found anywhere but in their place of origin. Those dishes are on his Register of Frustration and Deprivation. “On gray afternoons, I go over it,” he writes, “like a miser who is both tantalizing and tormenting himself by poring over a list of people who owe him money.” On brighter afternoons, he calls his travel agent.

Trillin shares charming and funny tales of managing to have another go at, say, fried marlin in Barbados or the barbecue of his boyhood in Kansas City. Sometimes he returns with yet another listing for his Register—as when he travels to Ecuador for ceviche, only to encounter fanesca, a soup so difficult to make that it “should appear on an absolutely accurate menu as Potage Labor Intensive.”

We join the hunt for the authentic fish taco. We tag along on the “boudin blitzkrieg” in the part of Louisiana where people are accustomed to buying boudin and polishing it off in the parking lot or in their cars (“Cajun boudin not only doesn’t get outside the state, it usually doesn’t even get home”). In New York, we follow Trillin as he roams Queens with the sort of people who argue about where to find the finest Albanian burek and as he tries to use a glorious local specialty, the New York bagel, to lure his daughters back from California (“I understand that in some places out there if you buy a dozen wheat-germ bagels you get your choice of a bee-pollen bagel or a ginseng bagel free”).

Feeding a Yen is a delightful reminder of why *New York* magazine called Calvin Trillin “our funniest food writer.”

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