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Chicken & Waffles in Bogota? Yes!

by Karen Catchpole | Oct 07, 2014

7-9 minutes

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Burger joints, among them multiple outlets of Colombia's El Coral chain plus smaller operations like La Hamburgeseria and Burger Market, have existed in Bogota for years. US fast food giants like Subway, McDonalds and, as of this year, [Starbucks](#) have a presence in the capital as well. Now, a crew of Colombian chefs and restaurateurs are perfecting the execution of North America's beloved plates. Here's where to get your Bogota fix of everything American-inspired -- from foot-long hot dogs to chicken and waffles!

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[Harry's Restaurant & Bar](#)

Even gourmets are in on Bogota's North American food trend. Harry's Restaurant & Bar, the more casual but still sophisticated

cousin to celebrity chef Harry Sasson's eponymous flagship restaurant, is one of them.

What to order: The foot long hot dog, and if you still have room, a piece of authentic deep dish apple pie à la mode.

Why it's legit: All-beef dogs in natural casings are made for the restaurant by Kohler butcher shop in Bogota. The dogs are grilled and deliver the snap and spice of a ballpark frank, albeit an oversized ballpark frank. The dill pickles are imported from the US and the dog is served with Dijon mustard, ketchup, and homemade mayonnaise. Though many Colombians come just for the dog, locals insist on eating it with a knife and fork. This is, after all, a country where fried chicken shops give customers plastic gloves so their hands don't get dirty. Feel free to dig in American style and show the locals how it's done.

[Ugly American Bar & Grill](#)

In July of 2014, Daniel Kaplan, the Bogota-born, US-raised chef who helped create the Burger Market chain in Colombia in 2005 after graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, opened Ugly American near Bogota's Zona T. "The name was actually the code name we had since the beginning of the project and it just stuck," says Kaplan. "Everybody understood the humor behind it and the reference to the Marlon Brando movie with the same name."

Though there are plenty of burgers on the menu at Ugly American, Kaplan wanted to dig deeper into North American cuisine. The menu is packed with dishes that even some North Americans would find obscure. "Over the last 15 years a lot of Colombians have had the opportunity to travel or study in the US, so they're familiar with the food," says Kaplan. "We want to show that American food can be at the same level as any French bistro or Italian trattoria and not just fast food."

What to order: Chicken and waffles, shrimp and grits, beignets, cheddar biscuits and gravy, and deviled eggs (perhaps over multiple visits).

Why it's legit: "Before opening we went on a research trip to the US and learned that this food is really becoming more and more popular again," Kaplan says. "We visited quite a few restaurants in New York and we also went to Austin where we were extremely impressed with the incredible food movement going on there, not just the BBQ but the entire food culture."

[La Fama BBQ](#)

“I think there is still more space for North American food in Bogota,” says Santiago Arango, a partner in La Fama BBQ. “But on a less massive scale—less TGI Fridays and Chili’s, and more traditional.”

La Fama, named after a regional word for butcher shop, opened at the end of 2012 in Zona G. You can smell the smoking meat a full block away from the ‘cue shack’s exterior. Inside, picnic tables, wait staff in plaid shirts and trucker caps, and shelves lined with paper towels complete the chic southern barbecue ambiance.

What to order: Brisket and *chicharrones*.

Why it’s legit: “I’ve been to Texas and Tennessee many times to understand the culture, the technique and the operation of some of the most important BBQ joints,” says Arango. La Fama’s main chef and pit master, Sergio Saavedra, was trained with the help of The Meat Hook in Brooklyn.

But that doesn’t mean US-style barbecue was an easy transfer to Colombia. For example, brisket cuts aren’t available in Colombia because of the unique genetics of the local cattle. However, the hump (*morillo*) of the local Cebu cattle offers a similarly marbled piece of meat that Saavedra has discovered can be smoked to tender, tasty perfection.

“We try to respect the culinary technique and tradition of barbecue using local meats and produce, and we have mixed a little bit of our culinary tradition with the technique, too,” says Arango. For example, the *chicharron* at La Fama is smoked then fried.

[La Xarcuteria](#)

Colombian-born, US-raised Chef Mike deMiguel of La Xarcuteria, which opened near Parque 93 in June of 2014, enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America after appeasing his parents by briefly attending University in pursuit of a degree in finance. After dropping out, he used the left over tuition money to fund a six month stint in Spain where he worked for free and learned the skills he now uses to smoke and cure his own meats for La Xarcuteria, a restaurant he says was inspired by gastro pubs like The Spotted Pig.

Unlike countries like Mexico and Spain, says deMiguel, Colombia has a less entrenched food heritage so the marketplace and customers are open to different cuisines and concepts such as smoked meats and gastro pubs. “In terms of food, Colombia is much more in line with the US than it is with Europe,” he says. “As

a chef I feel so much more at home here than I did in Spain.”

What to order: The New York City Reuben.

Why it's legit: Thick cut house cured pastrami is piled high on Masa Bakery's marble rye bread topped with Swiss cheese, Thousand Island dressing, and sauerkraut made for La Xarcuteria by a German expat.