

RULES FOR EATING ON THE ROAD

There's a reason foreign food is called foreign—it's not what you're accustomed to eating. To me eggs that have been buried in the ground for ten years or eel brains qualify as foreign food, especially since I didn't know eels had brains as I understand them. But to someone in, say, Chiang Mai, Spam and Reese's Peanut Butter Puffs cereal probably seem at least as incomprehensible. Hell, they are to me and I live here.

But this doesn't mean eating while on the road has to be left up to fate, good fortune, and the gods of salmonella and Maalox. You just have to know where to look and what to order. Whether you're in another country or another state, finding a place to eat and choosing your meal can be a challenge. I'm here to make this task a little less daunting.

1. Avoid restaurants filled with Americans, even in America. For that matter, avoid any place filled with tourists of any one nationality. Unless, of course, it's their country you're in. A roomful of Germans may signify a great place to eat in Munich but not in Prague. What it does mean is overpriced *gulas* with more bread dumplings than meat. Instead go find a little shop that makes and sells *chlebický*, the inexpensive open-faced sandwiches that are as close to a free lunch as you'll find in this world.

2. Watch out for ethnic restaurants that don't have people of the same ethnicity working there. A Mexican restaurant in Paris shouldn't be staffed by Parisians wearing sombreros and serapes. Not unless you want a *crêpe* disguised as a tortilla. Which brings us to....

3. Make it a point to eat as much of the local food as possible. Don't order a hamburger in Katmandu, a BLT in São Paulo, or a pizza in Singapore. Unless you've been there for more than two weeks. Sometimes these things *are* necessary.

4. If you point to something you've never seen before and the clerk or waitperson raises his or her eyebrows like you're completely insane for even thinking about it, order it. As a matter of fact, get a couple of them. Chances are it's a local specialty and it will be wonderful.

5. In the case of No. 4 above, don't under any circumstance ask what's in it. There are times when you should be grateful you don't understand the language.

6. Restaurants that say they're the best usually aren't. In San Francisco every restaurant has a sign in the window proclaiming it was voted Best Something-Or-Other in some weekly's poll sometime since the Great Earthquake of 1906. You'll have better luck with a place like the one which has a sign that says "We might just have the best hamburger in town."

7. Do trust a restaurant named Mama's. Not Mom's, but Mama's. That way you'll get great fried chicken livers in Memphis and incredible dirty rice in Lafayette, Louisiana, though it's true the rice may just taste better because you're eavesdropping on those two Cajun guys flirting with the girl behind the counter.

8. Small windowless cinderblock restaurants with a full parking lot are almost a sure thing. Especially if they serve burritos, barbecue, or fried chicken.

9. If the food is being cooked in a stall on the street and you have to fight your way to the front to get some it will be worth the battle and wait. And it will be cheap.

10. Never eat in a Chinese restaurant in Winslow, Arizona. Just trust me on this.

11. Don't use the word cuisine to describe a country's cooking when the best meals you eat there aren't of local origin. For example: When in England, if you want good food, eat in Indian restaurants. If you don't like Indian food, consider going on a fast. If you don't do that—and you eat a lot of sausage rolls, fish and

chips with mashed green peas (now there's a concept!), and Cornish pasties—you should consider going on a detox fast as soon as you leave the country.

12. The longer the line, the better the food.

13. If it looks good, eat it. If it doesn't, pass it up.

14. If they put it on the table, try it. If you don't like it, don't eat any more.

15. Drink the local liquor. Order wine in France, ouzo in Greece, arak in Bali, and Old Milwaukee in....okay, there are exceptions to this rule.

16. If you're not used to the currency, don't be afraid to pay for your meal by holding out a handful of the mysterious money and letting them take what they need. If you think they're taking too much just close your hand. If they look peeved, open it and let them take more, laughing as if it's an American custom. Before you know it they'll expect this from everyone who comes in wearing lime green shorts, a plaid shirt, over-the-calf socks, and has a camera hanging around their neck. Think of it as helping your fellow traveler.

17. Order any dish named after the city, region, or country. For example, when in Havana make sure you eat a Cuban sandwich so you can try the real thing. Of course the difficulty is that they call it a *media noche*, but if you forget just try one of everything on the menu or see someone else with one and point. Hey, if you want easy find the KFC.

18. And finally, do make it a point to stop at a McDonald's in every city you go to, which at this point isn't difficult. Don't eat there for god's sake—use the bathrooms. They're always clean. And free.

Excerpted from *If It's Such a Small World Then Why Have I Been Sitting on this Airplane for Twelve Hours* by Mad Dog. Available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com), or IfItsSuchaSmallWorld.com.