

CNN 5 Things

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One Thing: Mexico, Beyond the Border with Eva Longoria



Speakers

David Rind, Eva Longoria, , Woman (Spanish), Eva Longoria (Spanish), Woman

00:00:05

David Rind

There's been a movement at some restaurants in recent years to source more sustainable ingredients. Now the reasons vary from place to place - climate concerns, a rise in plant based diets, etc.. But there's no doubt that where an ingredient is from, the actual physical location can make a big difference. However, we can also think of that question: "where did this come from?" in a different way. How did this food in front of me actually come into being? What traditions or cultures had a role in shaping it into the dish we know today? We don't always think about our food like that. But maybe we should.

00:00:45

Eva Longoria

Cebolla cilantro, lemon. Wow, this smells so good.

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David Rind

My guest this week is Eva Longoria. You may know her from Desperate Housewives or other movies and TV, but recently she's been on a mission for CNN to get to the heart of those questions about food and culture in a place near and dear to her heart - Mexico.

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It's so soft. Suavecito, la carne.

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David Rind

Her new series is called Searching for Mexico. And today, I'm going to ask her what she found. From CNN, this is One Thing I'm David Rind.

00:01:27

David Rind

Eva Longoria. Welcome to one thing.

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Eva Longoria

Thank you for having me.

00:01:31

David Rind

Yeah. So I want to start here with what drew you to this project in the first place. What is your personal relationship with Mexico?

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Eva Longoria

Well, what drew me to the project as a whole, I was such a fan of Searching for Italy. When I saw that during the pandemic, we're all locked up, we're all home. And it was just like respite of like, Wow, look at Italy.

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David Rind

That looks nice, right?.

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Eva Longoria

That looks so nice, I want to go have a prosecco. And I was fascinated by Stanley's journey being an Italian-American really connected to his roots. And they came to me, CNN came to me and they said, we want to do a spinoff. They knew I was a big foodie cook, you know, drinker. And I pitched them Mexico. I was like, Well, you should do Mexico because it is a jewel of cuisine. I mean, it's just, you know, I thought people should know more about Mexico and the beautiful people.

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David Rind

So what did you see when when you were there? What were some of the experiences that really stood out?

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Eva Longoria

So many. I mean, I think I cried daily because when you're talking about the food of a country, you're talking about the people and you're talking about storytelling, and they're great storytellers.

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Eva Longoria

The bread here is very influenced by the the French occupation when the French was here.

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Eva Longoria

And if you follow the food chain, you see the history of colonization, the influence of European, Indian, Asian spices.

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Woman (Spanish)

It's fascinating how much flavor there is in a dish.

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Eva Longoria (Spanish)

And not just so much flavor. So much culture...

00:03:04

Eva Longoria

You know, you really see the history of the country as the food has adapted and evolved or how it stayed true. Like the corn tortilla has always been the corn tortilla, you know. So we traveled to six different states. We did Jalisco, Nueva Leon, Yucatan, Oaxaca, Mexico City and Veracruz. And it was an amazing journey because I think the identity of a food from Mexico has always been tacos, tequila, tacos, tequila. And it's and it does that really well. And I love tacos, tequila. But it is so much more. It's very, very diverse.

00:03:39

Woman

It's an oval shaped patty and it's stuffed with usually beans, fava beans or cheese. She puts the fava beans inside. And this is where it's like the tricky part. She has to keep the oval shape, keep the filling inside and the same thickness.

00:03:52

Eva Longoria

Oh, my gosh, she did that so fast.

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Eva Longoria

You know, I think what I loved about Mexico City is like Mexico City is a microcosm of the country. So you have all those different cuisines in one city. And so if you if you have to go anywhere, I would encourage Mexico City, because you can experience Yucatan food in Mexico City, you can have Oaxacan food in Mexico City, you can go to Oaxacan market in Mexico City.

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David Rind

And are people coming from all of those places into Mexico City to kind of sell their stuff and promote the food?

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Eva Longoria

Yeah,.

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Woman (Spanish)

This is the coal I use to stoke the fire.

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Woman

Otherwise, it doesn't taste the same.

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Eva Longoria

So she brings the carbon from her town.

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Woman

Yeah.

00:04:34

Woman (Spanish)

Yes but this is my job, I love it.

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Eva Longoria

There's tacos from Michoacan that are very spectacular. There's, you know, Oaxacan quesadillas. You know, there's different walks of life in Mexico City. It's definitely the melting pot still, you know, the largest one of the largest cities in the world.

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David Rind

Right. And you mentioned some the kind of the disparate parts that kind of feed into into what that Mexican identity is, is now what did the people there tell you about that and how that still kind of informs how they deal with food?

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Eva Longoria

Yeah, I mean, there's amazing ingredients are endemic to Mexico that people don't realize. Oh, that came from Mexico. Chocolate comes from Mesoamerica, vanilla comes from Mexico. That's an endemic plant in Mexico. Even though Madagascar produces the majority of vanilla in the world, it is from Mexico. The tomato. Even though the Italians made the tomato famous, it's endemic to Mexico. The avocado corn obviously is endemic to Mexico. So for me, those ingredients are still hugely popular, obviously within the country.

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David Rind

When you were growing up in Texas, did you have a sense of any of this as a, you know, kid growing up close to the border?

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Eva Longoria

I knew we were different in Texas because I'm a Texican, you know, just with like we eat flour tortillas in the north. You know, I married a guy long ago, which is a person from Mexico City, and he hates flour tortillas. It's like he thinks it's sacrilege to be like, that's not our tortilla. That's a pita.

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David Rind

They're my favorite for what it's worth.

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Eva Longoria

I know. Because we're Americans. You know, most Americans are familiar with the flour tortilla, not the corn tortilla, but the corn is really the heart of of Mexico. And but interestingly, when we were doing the novel in an episode where the flour tortilla came to be and why it's only in the north was during the Spanish Inquisition. And it's when Jews fled Spain into the new world and they didn't go to the Veracruz port. They went to a different port, which was up north, and a flour tortilla was basically unleavened bread. And so they hid the Judaism in the food. That's why goat is very popular in the north, because they wouldn't eat the pork and so they they eat goat instead. And so it was this crypto-Jewish community that thrived in the North. And that's why we eat flour tortillas only in the north is because the Jews brought wheat.

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David Rind

I think on this show is especially when we usually talk about Mexico, we're talking about it in relation to the immigration debate, what's going on at the border, to those issues. How do they present in the in the food?

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Eva Longoria

Well, I think, you know, this country, the number one cuisine in the United States is Mexican food. So that says a lot about the influence Mexican food has had here in the United States. But I think also, you know, people who go Taco Tuesday, you know, margaritas aren't connecting the dots with where that originated. And what a beautiful thing that we get to have Taco Tuesday or or tequila margaritas because of this amazing culture from Mexico. Because I think we especially, you know, on CNN, you only hear about, you know, the troubles with the border or the immigration issues or, you know, drug trafficking or whatever else is covered in the news. And so this is this is the side of Mexico. I know I live in Mexico. I live in Mexico City. It is a beautiful place full of culture and art and people that are pretty amazing. And so I think if people took the time to understand the country of Mexico better, they would have a greater appreciation for it.

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David Rind

It got me thinking about the term 'Mexican food' and how we kind of use it like when I was growing up. That was just kind of one thing. But to think that we could all kind of look at it a little differently, a little more nuanced.

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Eva Longoria

Yeah, I mean, if you look at the influence of colonization, you know, it was a vegetarian country before the Spaniards. There was no cow, there was no pig, there was no goat, there was no sheep, there was no dairy cow. And so once the Spaniards came to see how, you know, Nuevo Leon is heavily influenced by beef, I mean, it is beef country. It's the closest to Texas as well. The Yucatan is got beneath that pretty country. Like you. I had pork for breakfast, lunch, dinner, breakfast, lunch, dinner. And I was like, Oh, my God, this is crazy. We're in the Yucatan. Why are we having fish? Because of colonization and how the pig landed there and never left. And then dairy, you know, the Oaxacan cheese, which is called quesillo, is the most popular cheese you eat in a quesadilla. So if you're eating a quesadilla cheese from Oaxaca. The way they made that cheese was a mistake because they didn't have dairy, so they didn't really understand how to make dairy. And they over boiled and put too much water and tried to save this other type of cheese. And they made the most beautiful mistake that is known as quesillo

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David Rind

Do you cook at home?

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Eva Longoria

Yes. I'm a big cook.

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David Rind

Did you pick up any recipes from from your travels that you're going to try out.

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Eva Longoria

So many. I picked up so many recipes. A lot of them, too. Like I said, there's this movement, a decolonized diet, which means going back to the ancient grains and the ancient ways. And there was this.

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David Rind

Like down to the land itself.

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Eva Longoria

It's down to the land, down to, you know, they ate, you know, a lot of cactus. And I was in Guadalajara and there was this restaurant that did this amazing ceviche. And I was like, This is amazing. What is this? And they said, There's no fish in that. That's cactus. And it was like this mix of just endemic vegetables and cactus was like the meat. And it was so good. And I was like, I need this recipe. Like, how do I do this? How do I make this? It was so, so good.

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David Rind

Hands down. What's the best thing you made out of all the stuff?

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Eva Longoria

Oh, my God, That's such a hard question because each region was so different. I will say I didn't know a lot about Veracruz, the state, and it's a very long state. So it's like it it has mountains, it has the beach, it has lowlands. That's where vanilla comes from is Veracruz. So going to the vanilla plantations to me was pretty spectacular. It's the second most expensive spice in the world because you have to pollinate these orchids by hand, second to only to saffron.

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David Rind

And that's like why the vanilla at the store is like pretty pricey because of the work involved.

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Eva Longoria

It's a labor intensive fruit. Also, Oaxaca is having a moment. I mean, the mole from Oaxaca is is really amazing.

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David Rind

Can you describe mole for for those who may not have had it?

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Eva Longoria

Molly has like more than 28 ingredients. It has so many ingredients, but it's a very ancient source that is made up of chocolate in Chile. And even though, you know, chocolate in its origin is bitter, it's savory, it's not sweet. It was the Spaniards who decided to put milk and sugar in it. So then when they mixed it in this sauce with Chile, it was a it was a savory sauce that they would put on things.

00:11:49

David Rind

Okay. So I'm deeply hungry at this point. But stepping back, this whole conversation has got me really thinking about how I could be more intentional about traveling. You know, when I go on vacation abroad or just trying to understand a culture that you may not have. had much exposure to. How has making this show informed that idea for you?

00:12:12

Eva Longoria

I think that the easiest way to understand any culture is through the food. If you go to China, you don't have to speak Chinese. You can eat the food and understand it's a very easy entry point to countries you don't know. If you go to Mexico, you don't have to speak Spanish to understand the culture. You go and you eat and you're like, this is insane. So for me, I think that's just the easiest entry point. And I think this show is going to do what you just said, which is like, Where do I even begin? You're like, anywhere. Pick a pick a place and go and eat. That's how you do it.

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David Rind

Hmm. Well, this is really eye opening. You can catch Searching for Mexico tonight on CNN at 10 p.m. Eastern. Eva, thanks so much.

00:12:49

Eva Longoria

Thank you.

00:12:58

David Rind

One thing is a production of CNN Audio. This episode was produced by Paola Ortiz and me. David Rind. Matt Dempsey is our production manager. Faiz Jamil is our senior producer. Greg Peppers is our supervising producer. And Steve Lickteig is the executive producer of CNN Audio. If you're new around here, welcome and remember to follow the show wherever you listen so it pops up every week. We're back every Sunday. Talk to you later.