



Traveler's Table: Donuts around the world

By Kate Parham



Traveling foodie Kate Parham offers a taste of how nine cultures prepare donuts and shares where to try each dish.

When most Americans hear the word donut, visions of the legendary "Hot" sign at Krispy Kreme likely come to mind, quickly followed by a reverie of ring-shaped fried dough slathered in a crackly, sweet sugar glaze. In reality, donuts take on many shapes, sizes and stages of saccharine across the world. Take a look:

Chinese yóutiáo

Normally eaten at breakfast with rice *congee* (porridge) or soy milk, traditional *yóutiáo* is a deep fried and lightly salted rectangular breadstick native to China. Michael Moorhouse, executive pastry chef at [Wolfgang Puck's Nest at WP24](#) in LA, concocted a sweet interpretation of *yóutiáo*, a pillowy-soft donut with a crispy shell that's been dredged in matcha green tea powder and sugar. The donut's cult-like following has threatened the kitchen with harm should they ever remove it from the menu.

Spanish churros

The history of the churro, dough fried in a continuous spiral before being dusted in sugar and often served alongside hot chocolate, has long been debated. For confectionery connoisseurs keeping score, a dominant theory is the Portuguese brought the Chinese *yóutiáo* technique back to Europe after sailing the Orient. Spain isn't alone, however — a handful of other countries also lay claim to churros, particularly Mexico where the fried dough is often filled with dulce de leche. In Charleston, the churros at [The Grocery](#) are a signature dish. Expect an uber crusty donut served with three dipping sauces: crème anglaise, salted caramel and chili-orange chocolate.

Thai pathongko

When Chinese immigrants brought their dough (*yóutiáo*) to Thailand, *pathongko* was born. Slightly smaller than *yóutiáo*, these savory donuts, which consist of two finger-shaped pieces stuck together with water, are made with baker's ammonia, resulting in seriously airy and crispy crullers, nearly the opposite of dense cake donuts. In Portland, you'll find pathongko at Andy Ricker's [Sen Yai](#), served at breakfast alongside coconut custard or rice porridge.

French beignets

Though beignets (deep-fried choux) originated in France, the addictive pastry has since become synonymous with New Orleans after French colonists brought them to Louisiana in the 1700s. (Good to know: this is also where the addition of powdered sugar on top came about; in France beignets are often savory). NOLA-native Scott Serpas serves traditional Creole beignets at his

Atlanta hotspot, [Serpas True Food](#), where delicious dips like caramel and peanut butter and jelly gild the lily.

Italian zeppole

Italians are no strangers to donuts — they've got more than half a dozen varieties — but in the states, you're most likely to find *zeppole*, a firm-on-the-outside, fluffy-on-the-inside dough ball filled with custard and topped with powdered sugar. Head to Atlanta's booming [Little Italia](#), the brainchild of Giovanni di Palma of Antico fame, where you'll find traditional Neapolitan zeppole (baked, not fried) complete with yellow cream custard on the inside and a literal cherry on top.

Belgian croustillons

In Belgium, it's virtually impossible to visit a fair or carnival without ingesting pounds of *croustillons*, light fried dough balls (think Munchkin size) coated with powdered sugar. At new-to-the-scene [Dorchester Social Eatery](#) in Denver, chef and Belgium-native Michel Wahaltere is serving croustillons using the recipe he learned while staging at Michelin-rated Comme Chez Soi in Brussels — his version is made with beer, butter and lots of yeast, just like in Belgium. "When it has been done for years and years to perfection, you don't touch it," says Wahaltere.