

q travel: with BARRIE MAHONEY

'Tweeters from the Atlantic'

Barrie Mahoney was a head teacher and school inspector in the UK, as well as a reporter in Spain, before moving to the Canary Islands to launch and edit a new English language newspaper. He enjoys life in the sun as a columnist and author, and continues to write a series of popular novels and books for expats.



Chocolate, Avocado Eggs and the Canary Islands

The Spanish love their chocolate. Pastries are dipped into it, biscuits are coated with it, churros are drowned in it and anything else is sprinkled with it. Chocolate is everywhere in Spain, which is not surprising, because it was the Spanish who discovered and gave birth to modern chocolate. It was Spanish explorers who brought chocolate to Europe more than 500 years ago with the addition of sugar to a bitter cocoa drink transforming it into the chocolate delight that we know today. Indeed, it was Christopher Columbus who may be credited for being the first European explorer to encounter chocolate. It is said that Columbus intercepted a trading ship loaded with cocoa beans during one of his voyages, but thinking they were almonds he ignored the precious load.

The next step in the journey of chocolate was left to the explorer, Hernán Cortés, who may be credited for being the first European to bring chocolate to Europe. Cortés was mistaken for a God, and invited to a generous Aztec feast where he was given their prized, spicy drink of warm chocolate. Cortés was no fool, and the capitalist that he was led him to realise its value to both himself and the Spanish Crown.

The knowledge of how to turn cocoa beans into a delicious frothy drink was more a mystery that was jealously guarded by the Aztecs. It was left to Cistercian monks to get hold of and adapt the recipe that would produce chocolate for the Spanish nobility. They managed to keep their secret away from the rest of Europe for more than a century after its discovery.

Over the years, the recipe was modified to suit the European palette, which came in the form of cutting out the fiery hot peppers that the Aztecs traditionally used, replacing it with sugar cane from the Canary Islands to create the sweet chocolate that eventually became a worldwide sensation. It was decades later that a British company, founded by Joseph Fry, created the first ever chocolate bar that delivered chocolate and excess calories to the masses.

Recent shocking statistics screaming from some of the headlines this week accused Brits of eating more chocolate than anyone else in the world. Apparently, Brits munched their way through 8.4kg of chocolate each during 2017. Many commentators are suggesting that the increase in chocolate consumption is due to Brexit, with nasty rumours floating around that the price of chocolate bars will suddenly wildly increase following Brexit. Some Brexiters are wickedly claiming that it is the fault of Remainers, who are so depressed about severing their links with the chocolate makers of Europe, that they are putting away as much as they possibly can before Brexit takes place. In response, Remainers are claiming that increased consumption is due to Brexiters who are so nervous about the implications of Brexit, that they are anxiously eating their way through the nation's chocolate bars before it is too late. It is also said that they have a longing for European chocolate, which they wish to keep secret.

Sadly, it seems that since the takeover of Cadburys by an American company, British chocolate just doesn't satisfy British taste buds any more. Some of the blame for increased chocolate consumption is also being passed onto the current trend for alcohol flavoured Easter Eggs, which apparently are going down a treat. Personally, I am not too sure about gin and tonic flavoured eggs, but I am sure that readers will tell me how wonderful they are very shortly.

Despite these interesting statistics, I was surprised to see Spain not heading towards the top of the chocoholics list. For many Spanish, there is nothing more delicious to start the day than a steaming bowl of hot chocolate in which to dip a plateful of delicious churros, which is fried choux pastry (a little like a donut that has been stretched out of all recognition). It is a highly fattening, but delicious combination, I am told.

Personally, I am very keen to get my hands on one of the new vegan avocado chocolate bars that went on sale in Europe recently. The avocado used in these chocolate bars is 100 per cent natural freeze-dried avocado, and I am reliably informed that the delicious blend of avocado and organic dark chocolate is a chocolate lover's dream. Interestingly, this product has been brought to the world by James Cadbury, who is the great, great, great grandson of Cadbury's founder. Despite this amazing news, I was very disappointed not to have received an avocado filled chocolate Easter egg this year, but I live in hope.

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