

So you think you can braai?

MOST SOUTH AFRICANS RECKON WE MAKE THE BEST BRAAIS IN THE WORLD. BUT MOST SOUTH AFRICANS HAVEN'T BEEN TO ARGENTINA

By Nick Dall

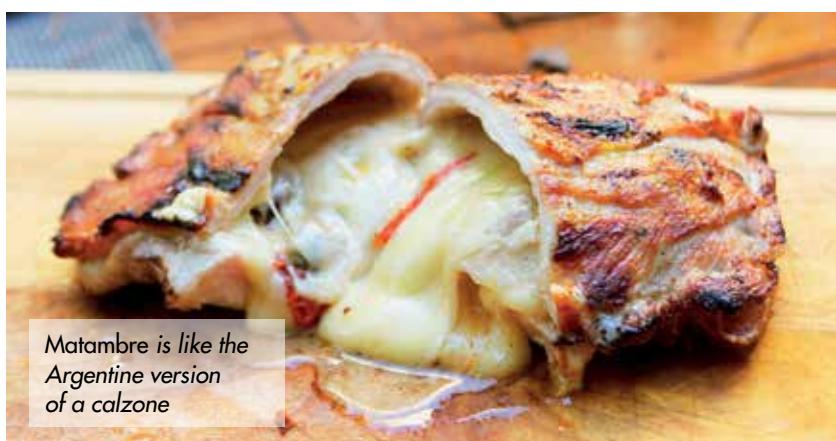
There was a time when fires were made from kindling and wood, and meat came from sheep, cows and kudu – not wrapped in plastic from the supermarket. In urban South Africa, those days seem to have vanished, but all across Argentina that time is now.

Argentines celebrate bachelorettes, first communions and birthdays in one way and one way only: they slow roast Neolithic hunks of A-grade beef above a sparse scattering of coals. These *asados*, as they're known, are more important to Argentine national identity than tango, football and Eva Perón put together.

Asados are all-day (or all-night) affairs. It's bad form to light the fire before your guests arrive and, because only the hardest wood is used, it can take hours before any food gets near the grid. But what's the rush?



The only seasoning used is coarse salt



Matambre is like the Argentine version of a calzone

In Argentina, cow is king, and every *asado* I ever attended was a glowing tribute to bovine brilliance. First up are bits most South Africans can't even bear to look at: sweetbreads, liver, intestines and heart. I was the same before I lived in Argentina – but now I often find myself dreaming of lemon-drizzled small intestines and perfectly salted thymus gland.

Next are sausages – garlicky chorizo and pitch-black blood sausage – closely followed by *matambre*, a firm fatty cut taken from between the skin and the ribs, one of the most delicious things to ever pass your lips. *Matambre* is used as you would a pizza base and smothered in mozzarella, tomatoes and garlic. Your cardiologist won't thank you, but your taste buds will.

Then, finally, it's time for the main act. Huge chunks of meat – butchered against the grain – are liberally seasoned with coarse salt before being coaxed to juicy perfection over a low heat. Every Argentine has their favourite cut, but really, it's all mouth-wateringly good, and so soft you can cut it with a spoon.

An *asado* isn't only about the meat – there's always good company, excellent wine and usually, a bowl of lettuce and a few rolls – but there's no denying what the star of the show is either. So next time you buy a bag of Charka or some pre-packed marinated kebabs, you had better do so with a deep sense of shame. We South Africans have a reputation to uphold, and we can learn something from our cousins across the Atlantic! ─