

Brazilians have a beef with UN meat warning

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At Rio de Janeiro's famed Churrascaria Palace restaurant, the sizzling of steaks, the swish of carving knives and sighs of satisfied diners drowned out a UN warning Monday [that meat can cause cancer](#).

Finishing an all-you-can-eat lunch, Gilson Gregoris, 59, said not even the United Nations could change his favorite menu.

"I eat [meat](#) almost every day," the systems analyst said.

"I know it's not good. But it's good!" Gregoris added, smacking his lips as he repeated the word.

Brazilians are convinced carnivores.

They eat almost three times as much meat as average European Union residents, according to OECD figures from 2014, while the huge country is also a leading producer of beef and other livestock.

So the warning from the International Agency for Research on Cancer—saying that processed meats like sausages sharply increase colorectal cancer risks and that red meat "probably" also poses a risk—is a hard sell.

Walk around Rio de Janeiro or most any Brazilian town on a Friday night and you're never far from the whiff of a barbecue, either at a sidewalk cafe or at impromptu roasts held in squares and quiet residential streets.

"It's a Brazilian tradition," said David Campos, a 43-year-old agronomist dining with Gregoris.

Viviane Escaleira, 44, added: "We grow up eating it."

Passion and moderation

The Churrascaria Palace, opened just off Copacabana beach in 1951, is a temple to this love affair.

Everything, down to the white table cloths, murals and light piano music, is preserved as it was six decades ago—even some of the staff have worked there for decades.

In the kitchen, there has been equally little surrender to modern sensitivities.

Waiters in elegant black outfits file in and out with giant skewers of beef steak, lamb and chicken or pushing a trolley bearing a set of ribs that wouldn't look out of place in a [natural history museum](#).

October at the restaurant has been declared "Festival of exotic meats" month.

Owner Antonio Saraiva, 46, says that even if he also offers fish and salads, there's no need to apologize for meat.

"Meat is very important on the Brazilian's menu," he said, expounding passionately on the hidden intricacies of the cuisine, such as the search for new cuts and tastes concocted from crossbreeding cattle.

"Everything in excess is not good. If this was a cafeteria where the same group of people ate the same thing every day it wouldn't be any good,"

Saraiva added.

"But most nutritionists say that [red meat](#) once or twice a week has a variety of benefits. I think that like fried food or seafood or any food, everything must be balanced."

The latest scientific gloom on meat diets is just a fad, according to this restaurateur.

"Everyone knows that research into food is something that changes a great deal as time goes by," he said.

"Recently you had research in Brazil portraying the egg as a villain; today, you'll have the egg presented as beneficial. They presented wine like something very bad, but today they'll say that wine drunk in small quantities—one or two glasses a day—is beneficial," he said.

Across Rio in the teeming streets around the Central train station, barbecue enthusiasts at the other end of the economic scale also said that no amount of warnings will change habits.

"At any get together of Brazilians, the principal food will be meat, that's a certainty," said Cesar Gabriel, 22, who grabbed a kebab from a street vendor before catching a bus home from work as a nurse.

Changing "is not an easy thing," he added.

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