

St. Louis Stands Out Within Barbecue's Bermuda Triangle.

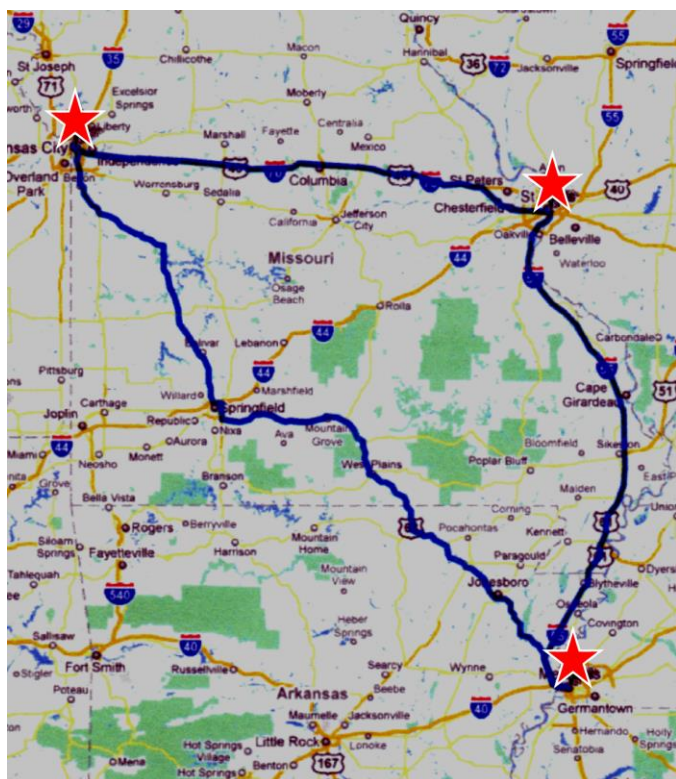


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For decades writers have detailed a mysterious and dangerous part of the Atlantic Ocean known as the Bermuda Triangle.

The area between Florida, Bermuda and Puerto Rico is known for the disappearance of aircraft and ships in a manner that cannot be explained by piracy, human error, equipment failure or natural disasters.

While not as ominous or dangerous, the Midwest has its own geographical three corners connected by the best barbecue in the world.



The points of this triangular shape include Kansas City to the West, St. Louis in the middle and Memphis to the South. It provides what one might call The Barbecue Triangle.

St. Louis forms the apex of this triangle and deservedly so. The historical contributions of the Gateway City to the world of Barbecue are simply unparalleled.

It begins with the pork spare rib, the most desired and most famous of all St. Louis Barbecue. Most barbecue restaurants across the nation will have the St. Louis Style Spare Rib on their menu. It is the most asked for rib in the United States.

These ribs are distinguished by how the rack is trimmed. In preparation the brisket bones are removed from the bottom of the rack leaving two outstanding products, the rib tips and center rectangular rack portion.

The origins of the St. Louis Style Cut, like the Bermuda Triangle, are quite a mystery. Many accounts trace it back to the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. The make-up of the local ethnic community may have also influenced this special cut.

Rib tips became popular in the early 1900s and price played a role. The popularity of the tip grew so much that butchers began marketing the two cuts separately.

Trimming the spare rib provides other cooking benefits such as fitting the rib rack more evenly on the grill with other slabs of ribs.

In addition to this special cut, St. Louis stands-out with its diversity of barbecue cooking styles. This is once again influenced by the many ethnic neighborhoods found throughout the community. Not all regions can boast about their old-world barbecue recipes.

This includes those who favor slow cooked delights on low heat or those who enjoy high-temperature grilling with panned meat simmering for hours in sweet barbecue sauce, or a combination of both.

Another local tradition is the St. Louis Style barbecue pork steak. Only found in this region pork steaks are cut from the Boston Butt, usually in one-inch thick steaks and trimmed of excess fat.

Other cities may have their pulled pork sandwiches but only in St. Louis can you find the butt cut up into steaks and barbecued. The pork steaks are usually cooked in one of two ways. One method is to simmer the steak in sauce.

This involves slow open grilling until done, then simmering the steaks in a pan of barbecue sauce on the back of the grill. Beer is often added to keep the sauce from becoming too thick. The finished product is a pork steak that can literally be cut with a fork.

This method is what Dave Glover, host of the Dave Glover radio show in St. Louis, describes as a “lazy man’s method” of barbecuing.

It doesn’t take much skill but most of the cooking and simmering is done while one sits in the shade of their backyard in some 120% local humidity. One “simmers” along with their pork steaks, sipping on a cold Falstaff or Budweiser.

High-heat cooking is also another time honored local tradition. The pork steaks are placed on high heat then placed off to the side indirectly from the charcoal. Smoking continues in temperatures around 200 to 225 degrees for approximately 2.5 to three hours.

When these steaks are nearly finished they are brushed

with one’s favorite St. Louis Style barbecue sauce until the sauce is glazed onto the meat.

The low slow smoking process causes the protein in the meat to break down while the fat dissolves and is absorbed by the meat. The end result is an undeniably tender and tasty pork steak.

Most of the nation is missing out on this culinary masterpiece, another great barbecue plus for St. Louis.

In all, St. Louis-style barbecue sauce is tomato-based, thinned with a little vinegar, sweet and/or spicy. It is different than other regions, thinner by Kansas City standards but not as thin as Memphis and Texas offerings.

Traditionally St. Louis Style barbecue has the grilled or smoked meat simmering in a liberal amount of St. Louis style sauce until the meat falls apart.

It was also in St. Louis that the Maull’s Company produced the first commercially made barbecue sauce in the United States back in 1926.

Though the Barbecue Triangle still holds culinary mysteries, which may never get discovered, finding and dissecting these special delicacies is pure fun. Barbecue is All-American and St. Louis has a claim on many of the fine traditions barbecue lovers now enjoy.

Kansas City may have its well known barbecue restaurants such as Gates and Arthur Bryant’s, and Memphis may have the Rendezvous and Neely’s Interstate Bar-B-Q, but St. Louis has its own mainstays.

Some of our local favorites include Super Smokers, Pappy’s Smokehouse, Richard’s Ribs and Smoki O’s, Phil’s Bar-B-Q, Charlotte’s Ribs, and Penny’s BBQ House just to name a few.

But what is surely missing from other Triangle towns are the ethnic communities and cherished traditions of backyard barbecues which make St. Louis so unique.

Tradition and innovation is what placed St. Louis on the apex of The Barbecue Triangle and we are blessed to enjoy great and diverse barbecue in any of the three regions.

No matter one’s taste, when you’re hunting for special culinary treasures in The Barbecue Triangle, St. Louis is simply a great place to disappear.