

Falafel, faith and deep-fried mystery food: Shaun Micallef eats America



Maybe we should eat before Armageddon arrives. (Shaun Micallef)

Extreme faith? Try extreme food. Comedian Shaun Micallef was in America to discover what life's like as a Mormon, but his digestive system got as much of a challenge as his thoughts on spirituality.

By
Kylie Walker

16 JAN 2017 - 2:58 PM UPDATED 6 FEB 2018 - 11:04 AM

Is the meaning of life hiding somewhere in a squirrel burger, or a fried chicken steak? A kill-your-mouth chilli-dusted falafel, perhaps?

Maybe not, but when you're travelling across America on a mission to explore extreme belief, you gotta eat!

In the series *Stairway to Heaven* (Wednesdays at 9.40 pm on SBS from 7 February, then [SBS On Demand](#)), comedian Shaun Micallef adventures into worlds of extreme faith exploring spirit healing psychic surgery, Mormon prophets and polygamists, and doomsday preppers convinced that the end is nigh, on a quest to find the meaning of life itself.

Intrigued by those with 'unshakeable faith' - or as he puts it, "I've been wondering if there's more to life than being a semi-professional comedian" - Shaun immerses himself into some of the world's most unique religions and beliefs.

On the American leg of his journey, he immersed himself in the eats, too. It wasn't always pretty. His food dairy looks like this:

1. On the icy road to Moab is **JB's Restaurant** - a charming out of the beltway eaterie, set like a pearl in the swine of several other barely distinguishable franchise establishments. I ordered a glass of water.



2. Nestled in one of the world's most accessible car parks is [Eddie McStiff's Restaurant and Bar](#). 'Fast and easy' was how one customer described waitress Phoebe (who can often be found in the car park on her breaks).

Unfortunately closed on the day I turned up, I had to break in through a back window for my meal. Four stars (one off for it still being frozen).



3. Like the aqueducts of free water that flow like wine from the fountains of Rome, this charming drinking hydrant off the David Koresh Highway in Texas has slaked the thirst of many a parched tourist since 1978. In a world where the value of most things seem to have a price it's nice to find one of life's most precious resources still available to anyone with a Avery-Fendale 6" wrench.



4. If you like your food French-Mexican with a pirate twist then you should look no closer than [Señor Frogs in glittering Las Vegas](#). Still run by the crime family of Bugsy Siegal (who ordered it built in 1952 so it could be burned down for the insurance but changed his mind when Frank Sinatra told him how beautiful it was), this is the ideal spot for a snail burrito or goose liver nachos covered in Brie. Entertainment is

included in the price, so even the most weary traveller can wile the night away drinking tankards of Mexicoke and tapping their feet to the ever popular Celine Dion impersonator Garvin Le Roy. Cover charge also includes 140 seconds on the slots and a chance to 'walk the plank' with your favourite out-of-copyright cartoon character. I chose Underdog.

As the prices are extortionate at Señor Frogs, I snuck in an apple I'd stolen earlier from a blind lady on a street corner.



5. Here I am enjoying the al fresco dining experience of the American Drive-In truck stop in Chicopee, Alabama.



6. Whenever the Duchess of Cornwall finds herself in Arkansas she makes sure to sample the myriad delights of Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen. Baked crawfish, harmony grits, Cajun chitlins - and all to go, thank you kindly Colonel. Yes, it's Midwestern hospitality Southern-style and in a toe-licker' biodegradable bag. As the Duchess herself says: "Them thar vittles am mighty powerful."



7. Superior German food technology know-how first came to the Glen Campbell Turnpike in 1977 and since then the famished natives of Tulsa have never needed to wonder where they're gonna get their Scottish-style breakfast fix. And it's not just their pancakes! Crepes, flapjacks, blinis, pizza dogs, tortilla s'mores, Lahoho crop circlettes - and all served fresh-off-the-griddle by the all-natural waffle-fed waiting staff. Every day is Shrove Tuesday at **Pancake Haus**.



8. Middle Eastern gourmands throughout Tallahassee all agree: "Mediterranean food is strikingly similar to whatever it is they eat in Jerusalem". Feta cheese, leaves of some description, cubes of meat, yadda yadda yadda. All meals come with a Big Gulp soda and giant cookie.



9. **Pioneer Village's world famous Fried Chicken Steaks.** Batter, butter, ghee, tallow, fat, lard, wiener oil and reduced pork itchings all meld together in the Pioneer kitchen's very own double-deep fryer to make that chicken steak SIZZLE!!!! Remember, if you eat seven in one sitting - the eighth is FREE (as is the trip to the hospital).

10. America is a land on the go and what better way to eat than on the go as well. Detroit virtually invented the mass-produced automobile and these days cup holders are as standard as seat warmers and prescription windscreens. Food, like the animals that are processed to make it, must be adaptable. A piece of fried chicken that can't be eaten from a cup while travelling at high speed along an express way is as useless as a brake-light on a TransAm. That's why **Church's** uses chickens with legs are in the shape of Colt revolvers. Yes, siree Bob - leather steering wheel in one hand and the reassuring feel of a gun in the other - but one you can eat when you get sick of waving it out the window. Animal activists and bleeding heart liberals might protest that mutating one God's creatures into some easier to grab, like a fire-arm, is unnatural but even they'd have to admit the ingenuity in turning the whole argument into a 2nd Amendment issue. Americans have a right to bear not only arms but also legs, wings, necks, parson's noses and those oh-so succulent breast fillets - and all with Church's patented popcorn crunch bubble 'n' squeak pork crackling smear pasted over it and blackened to perfection with a welding torch. And remember - Church's is an actual church and registered charity, so eating its products is an exercise of the religious freedom granted by the 1st Amendment too.



Shaun Micallef's *Stairway to Heaven* airs on Wednesdays at 9.40pm on SBS from 7 February; catch-up on episodes online via [SBS On Demand](#).