

Trucks send hearts a-Twitter

BY KRISTA SIMMONS

From supper clubs to food festivals to private dinners, gourmands have historically met one another around the edible, cooking up lifelong friendships and, sometimes, hot romance. But it's not every day that one gets an invite to a highfalutin' affair put on by Tasmin Lonsdale; happily, Angelenos have a less-formal but equally social option: L.A.'s many food trucks.

The Twitterati have transformed these road stoves into something much more than a place to find cheap, unique eats; they're now a meeting point for young singles to connect. A collision of technology, food and followers, the food truck phenomenon has become like a roving dating service and street meat market.

Surprised? You shouldn't be. It makes sense that L.A.'s mobile food culture would serve as a platform for the ever-expanding Internet-based dating scene. After all, Los Angeles has one of the largest networks of trucks and carts in the country. Singles are meeting in line and on Twitter while stalking their favorite trucks, some even taking their first dates to street food festivals (where trucks gather) to show off their savvy. It's a natural outgrowth of L.A.'s vehicular culture. Now, your date is likely to ask not only what car you drive but also what truck you're hitting up later.

Dave Dhani, owner of one of the most followed road stoves, the Grilled Cheese Truck, met his girlfriend of three months, Palm Sirichanya, through the truck's Twitter feed. With more than 19,000 followers, Dhani receives upward of 300 Tweets per day, but something about Sirichanya struck him as special.

After scoping her website and profile, Dhani found that Sirichanya was not only creative (she works in film production) but cute too. He was smitten.

The two spoke via Twitter's Direct Messaging and e-mail, bonding over similar tastes in food and restaurants. Even-



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In-line dating: At L.A. Street Food Festival, from top left, clockwise, are Mili Patel and Srini Panguluri; Eugenia Hwang-Riggins and Ace Riggins; Megan Goodchild, Nick Cernoch; Tamar Bashian, left, Francis Marquez.



Women are nearly twice as likely to give out their phone number when there's a romantic song playing in the background.

— Report by scientists from universities of Southern Brittany and Southern Paris in July 2010 *Psychology of Music Journal*

tually, they hit the Hudson House for Taco Tuesday and have been together ever since. "Our first kiss was at the Grilled Cheese Invitational. We were waiting in line for the Sweets Truck," Dahni says. "She melted my heart."

The trucks are not just a destination for date nights — they're a social situation ripe for casual last-call bar hookups too. Trucks often park outside such bars as the Brig and Bigfoot Lodge, waiting for patrons eager for a sober-up snack.

"It's kind of the post-game show. Everyone is more comfortable and relaxed. Shirts are untucked and unbuttoned, stilettos are off. Everyone is more approachable," says Dominic Lau, owner of the Don Chow Taco Truck.

It's like an informal after-party with no velvet rope. Crowds of twentysomethings gather outside bars to snap up some cheap eats without having to drive to Denny's or Swingers where the environment is more intimidating.

"When you're in a booth back-to-back, it's hard to start a conversation. It's much easier to do that at a truck, where there's a big cluster of people," Lau says. He's seen countless pickups at his truck on the weekends.

That's just how Jammers DeLeon found fleeting romance at the well-known Kogi truck last year, when the Korean taco purveyor made its first trip to the San Fernando Valley.

"There was this guy who was standing in front of me playing with his iPhone too, and we got to talking. We ended up talking for the rest of the three hours we were in line," she recalls. While a relationship never materialized, a lasting nickname did. "I always called him my Kogi Boy."

And it's not a bad place to take a first date, either. Since the gourmet food trucks have gone mainstream, it's more acceptable to bring an adventurous diner to one of the mobile stoves.

Twitter user @AlyRizzo and her boyfriend had their first date at the debut of the L.A. Street Food Festival in February. The two braved the horrendous crowds at the L.A. Center Studios, enjoying exotic eats from more than 30 trucks, and struck up a lasting romance.

"We chase trucks together whenever we can," she says. It was love at first bite.