

The Zest Podcast S6E6

[00:00:00] **Kristen Hare:** Our time is limited, and, and if we don't understand that after this pandemic, we're not going to. And so we need to use the time we have, I think really wisely, and eating and drinking and adventuring with people we love, I think is a really good way to spend that time.

[00:00:15] **Dalia Colón:** I'm Dalia Colon, and this is The Zest. Citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor, and Southern charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State. Prepare to be inspired. We are speaking with author, Kristen Hare about things to eat in Tampa Bay that deserve a spot on your bucket list.

[00:00:40] Get ready to fill up your calendar with some foody field trips, because this week's guest is Kristin Hare. Her book, *100 Things To Do in Tampa Bay Before You Die* is now in its third edition, and many of the entries are food related. There's something for everyone. Whether you live in Tampa Bay, or you're starting a list of places to check out the next time you find yourself passing through. I recently visited Kristin at her home in Lithia, where she shared her favorites from breakfast to burgers, to what she called, quote " best Cuban sandwich of my life." Here's my conversation with Kristen.

[00:01:19] **Kristen Hare:** This book is one of a series of books around the country of things to do in different cities. And when I first moved here in 2012, uh, we were only supposed to be here for a year and my husband and I decided that we were gonna live like tourists and do and see all of the things that we could.

[00:01:34] And so, uh, by the time we decided to stay, I'd been in touch with the publisher and we decided, I decided to take on a hundred things to do in Tampa Bay before you die. There's a bucket on the front of the book. It's a little tongue in cheek, I think after the pandemic, maybe a little on the nose on purpose because you know, our time is limited and we should do and see all the things we can.

[00:01:55] This edition is the third edition and, uh, it's full of adventures and excuses to get together with people you love and go visit places. You've probably never been before in Tampa Bay .

[00:02:07] **Dalia Colón:** We all need that.

[00:02:08] **Kristen Hare:** Yes.

[00:02:08] **Dalia Colón:** There's a lot of food in the book, which we'll get to.

[00:02:10] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:02:10] **Dalia Colón:** But what are some of the just general ideas in the book?

[00:02:13] **Kristen Hare:** It's divided into, um, a number of categories, food and drink, um, entertainment, culture and history, shopping and fashion, and I have 14 day trips in this book, which was really fun to do. It was fun to get out of the borders of what we consider Tampa Bay and go kayaking in Apopka or go, um, take a, a soak in the mineral waters at Warm Mineral Springs. Um, so it was really fun to just have some adventures. You know, a lot of us, I think still, maybe aren't completely comfortable traveling on planes or out of town. So hopefully this book gives people an excuse to go have some adventures and be able to sleep in your own bed and avoid airports, which are like, you know, kind of a mess right now.

[00:02:56] **Dalia Colón:** Oh yeah. kind of a mess all the time.

[00:02:58] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:02:58] **Dalia Colón:** Now you said that you moved here. Where did you move from?

[00:03:00] **Kristen Hare:** We lived in St. Louis for five years. And before that St. Joseph, Missouri for five years before.

[00:03:05] **Dalia Colón:** Okay. Midwest.

[00:03:06] **Kristen Hare:** Yep. And before that I was in the Peace Corps and lived in Guyana in South America.

[00:03:10] **Dalia Colón:** Very cool. Yeah. Well, you're. The you're the perfect person to write this book because you're always seeking adventure. Now, do you think coming from the quote unquote, outside made you the right person to write this book, as opposed to someone who's lived in Tampa Bay, their whole life and thinks they know everything?

[00:03:26] **Kristen Hare:** I think there are a lot of great perspectives that locals have, but I think when you've lived someplace for a while, you can start to take things for granted and you can, especially in Tampa Bay where, you know, the rest of the world comes to vacation, it's really easy to write certain things off because we think, well, that's for the tourists. So my, uh, motto is don't let the tourists have all the fun. And, and I think we have to make ourselves sort of challenge what we think is, is worth doing. And I came to all of this with new eyes. So I didn't know the things that people had decided, or we're not worth doing, and one of my favorite things in reporting the first edition, and this has been true ever since is talking to locals about what they love. And everybody has one or two favorite things that they always take their family to do when they come into town. But I, what I found is that nobody has the same one or two things. So I just was a nosy reporter, which is a very comfortable space for me and asked everybody I knew. After the first edition, I got this reaction from locals that was like, oh, I've lived here for 40 years, and I didn't know that there was a castle in Ona, Florida.

[00:04:35] **Dalia Colón:** Oh yeah. Solomon's castle!

[00:04:37] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah. Or I've been here forever and I didn't know that I should go and explore the trees at Medard Park in Plant City.

[00:04:43] **Dalia Colón:** Love Madad park.

[00:04:44] **Kristen Hare:** It's such a special place. If you live at Hillsborough, you probably know about it. If you don't, you might not. So I think, you know, just reporting on the best treasures that other people have found and sharing them, and then being open to hearing new ones, has led to three editions full of, hopefully, great treasures that we should enjoy and visit.

[00:05:04] **Dalia Colón:** I love that so much. And a lot of the treasures are food related.

[00:05:07] **Kristen Hare:** Yes.

[00:05:07] **Dalia Colón:** So let's get into it. What are some of your picks? You've got the book right here.

[00:05:11] **Kristen Hare:** So food has been hard. Um, for me, not because I don't love it, but because you know, I'm a daily journalist and I'm right now, I'm writing a book and I know what happens to restaurants. We're lucky if we get to have them for very long, they change, you know, pretty frequently. So what I've

learned in three editions is to seek out the wonderful places that we're lucky are still around, especially after the pandemic, when a lot of restaurants didn't make it, we're just really lucky to have them..

[00:05:40] **Dalia Colón:** So, what are some of the restaurants that have stood the test of time that are worth a visit?

[00:05:45] **Kristen Hare:** One of my very favorites and it's new to this edition is The Jerk Hut. Uh, this is fantastic Jamaican food. I think it's been in Tampa for 30 years. There are a couple locations. Um, I discovered it driving back and forth from, um, Tampa to my full-time day job at the Pointer Institute in St. Pete. And would, you know, be kind of craving some West Indian food and would stop and get some Roti and good Curry or Jerk chicken. My husband was always very happy when I brought that home for him. I love, um, the Jerk Hut. I also love the library, uh, which is this delightful and very unexpected restaurant that the first floor of Johns Hopkins in St. Pete.

[00:06:25] **Dalia Colón:** The hospital.

[00:06:25] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah, it is not a hospital restaurant. It is a really gorgeous place. It's very photogenic. And the food is really fantastic. I always go back. What I'm always looking for is this mix of, um, fantastic food and a really great experience. And so another one that's been in all three additions is the Chataway and St. Pete. Their hamburgers are some of my favorite in the area. And, um, this, the atmosphere of being in this place that has been around for so long and is very Florida on the outside, and a proper British tea room on the inside is just charming.

[00:06:59] **Dalia Colón:** I love these three right off the bat because they're so diverse. Jerk Hut. The flagship location is on Fowler near the University of South Florida Tampa campus. And we actually had Andrew Ashmeade, the owner, on a few years ago, and I remember he was making rum punch and he said, it's happiness and good vibes in a glass . And that stuck with me because that's what we need. And then the library is so sophisticated and then the tea room.

[00:07:23] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:07:23] **Dalia Colón:** Very diverse. What are some of your other favorite foodie finds?

[00:07:26] **Kristen Hare:** So a couple of these I've found, interestingly enough, in my other job, which is writing obituaries for the Tampa Bay Times,

[00:07:33] **Dalia Colón:** Huh?

[00:07:34] **Kristen Hare:** I write stories about regular people in our community. And one of the ones that I added in this edition, that I really love, and that sometimes people don't know about is the Citrus Place. So this is just off the highway in Terra Ceia. It's been there for about 50- and you can go there and get fresh squeezed orange juice, fresh key lime pie, jellies, jams all kinds of just delicious things that you're not gonna get, probably, at your local grocery store. I love that one. Um, I think it's really special. I also love, uh, my kids love Datz. um, which has several locations because they have the world's best grilled cheese.

[00:08:11] **Dalia Colón:** Oh my gosh. The world's best grilled cheese, potato chips...

[00:08:14] **Kristen Hare:** Yes.

[00:08:14] **Dalia Colón:** Desserts as big as your head....

[00:08:16] **Kristen Hare:** Yes. Very indulgent food. I did also, I wrote an obituary for a restaurant and it ended up coming back, not because of my obit, but I wrote about The Seahorse and this is this institution in Pass-a-Grille. And, um, people go there for breakfast. They actually line up around the block and when it was set to close, I wrote. I, I like a, you know, a remembrance of it and it's been it's, you know, been through hurricanes and, you know, time and everything else. And it ended up reopening after the employees bought it and brought it back to life. And...

[00:08:47] **Dalia Colón:** Oh my gosh,

[00:08:47] **Kristen Hare:** I got to go there with a, a friend last summer and have breakfast and had some of the best shrimp and grits that I've ever had. It's a really special place. And, you know, a good reason to get up early and go to the beach and, and not wait to park at Pass-a-Grille, which is, is always a nightmare.

[00:09:02] **Dalia Colón:** Sure. That sounds like a movie. Any other favorites, you and I are, are both in like Eastern Hillsborough County.

[00:09:09] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:09:09] **Dalia Colón:** Anything out in our neck of the woods?

[00:09:11] **Kristen Hare:** So I really love. I mean, I think Plant City is, we know it for the strawberries and it's, it's worth knowing for those strawberries Plant City's downtown is so sweet and interesting. And I love going to Plant City starting the day at Parksdale Farm Market. And my personal favorite to think to get there is that strawberry shake

[00:09:33] **Dalia Colón:** mm-hmm

[00:09:34] **Kristen Hare:** and you can get it year round. It's always good. Also, just like they have the most amazing plants for sale there. So if like me, you're a pandemic plant lady, you know, plants are expensive depending on where you get them from. They have a really good selection, um, then go shopping and eat in downtown Plant City. And then I love to go to Keel and Curley to round things off, have a glass of wine or a local beer and some appetizers. That's a favorite thing to do.

[00:09:58] **Dalia Colón:** Oh yeah, love those recommendations. Anything in like the Asian food space.

[00:10:03] **Kristen Hare:** I think I, at this point, I feel like everybody in Tampa Bay knows about Wat Tampa, but there is a gorgeous Thai Buddhist temple on the Palm River. And every Sunday they have a market and you know, you need to take cash and it's changed a little bit through the pandemic. I don't know if it's changed back, but it is still functioning and you can go and have really authentic Thai Food with this one of a kind background, you know, there's a, a gold roofed, Buddhist Temple behind you and the Palm River, you'll eat on, um, some picnic benches and it is just a one-of-a-kind experience.

[00:10:37] **Dalia Colón:** That is giving me like goosebumps, because that's one of my favorite places to take visitors. And I would argue that not everyone in Tampa Bay knows about it.

[00:10:45] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:10:46] **Dalia Colón:** Sunday morning, you gotta get there early.

[00:10:48] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:10:48] **Dalia Colón:** Skip church. Bring cash, as you said, and like the mango sticky rice, you, you feel like you're in another country.

[00:10:56] **Kristen Hare:** Yes.

[00:10:56] **Dalia Colón:** You line up at the food stalls. There are these, a lot of Thai women, there are actual monks walking around and then you get your food and you eat it at the picnic table and you can bring your kids and your dog. They also sell plants.

[00:11:09] **Kristen Hare:** Yes.

[00:11:09] **Dalia Colón:** And beautiful orchids. That's an experience.

[00:11:12] **Kristen Hare:** It's such an experience. And I feel. It is one of the places. And I think every place in this book does this, but it, it reflects how amazingly diverse Tampa Bay is. You know, when my husband and I, when we, my, our family, when we moved here in 2012, it took us about two weeks to look at each other and say, oh yeah, we're never leaving. And. That's a thing that I love about it is I think our food reflects the rich history and culture, but also the influx of all of the different kinds of people that we have. It's not one thing. And I love that about Tampa Bay.

[00:11:44] **Dalia Colón:** I love that too. You're really helping me to appreciate where we live. Now what makes a place worthy of being in this book someplace that we should eat before we die?

[00:11:53] **Kristen Hare:** So let me give you two examples of this. For me, the, the lens with this third edition was, you know, is the food great? Is the atmosphere great? Did it make it through the pandemic? Right. I can't include places obviously that closed. And how long has it been around? I was really seeking out places with a rich history in the area and maybe the kind of places that don't always make, you know, the top 10. Restaurant list because they're not sexy. So two places that I think are not sexy, but are certainly fabulous are West Tampa Sandwich Shop and that's in West Tampa and I had the best Cuban Sandwich of my life. Now I, don't fight me, I'm not an aficionado.

[00:12:32] **Dalia Colón:** Don't email me...

[00:12:33] **Kristen Hare:** sandwiches. Don't...

[00:12:34] **Dalia Colón:** Email her...

[00:12:35] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah. Don't come at me on Twitter. I don't wanna hear about it. I, I trust your favorite is also the best, but this one is the one that, uh, President Obama had when he came to visit and they put honey on it?

[00:12:46] **Dalia Colón:** What?!

[00:12:47] **Kristen Hare:** And it's. I'm a big sweet and salty person. And when I went with one of my coworkers last summer, you know, it's also huge. So I ate half of it and the other half did not make it home.. it definitely got eaten on the car ride on the way home only because it was so delicious. That's a really special place full of history. The other ones is Brocato's, and this is also in Tampa. And, um, their devil crabs are, this is like not something I could eat regularly because it's so rich, which is, is fried bunch of double crab and it's so delicious and really just, I think, a special experience. Um, there's lots of places to sit. It's one of those places where the history is all over the walls and the food is as great as the atmosphere.

[00:13:29] **Dalia Colón:** Mm-hmm, good stuff that, that one's a treat. Maybe. Now this is a discussion that my husband and I have a lot. How do you balance. Trying all these places before you die with returning to your favorite places, if the sandwich was so good that it didn't even make it home. Don't you just wanna go back there tomorrow?

[00:13:47] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah, I think that you always have to think about who are you with? And so the, the trick for me is. Am I with my husband who doesn't love to drive for long distances, am I with my kids who might be up for it, but what are they gonna think of a diner versus a sit down restaurant versus, you know, something outside, right? Or am I with my mom who literally will go with me anywhere I decide to go, um, or friends or, you know, so who are you with? And, um, what kind of experience do they wanna have? What kind of energy do you have? I try to at least once a month find someplace new to go to, but certainly we have our favorites. Mine include there's a Mexican restaurant, just down the street from here. Uh, and Lithia called Lavia, which is the, some of the best Mexican food I've had. It's like, you know, in a shopping mall, basically a strip mall. My favorite. Brewery is Leaven and that's in Riverview, also in a strip mall. Um, just off of Boyette Road. These are places that I think are, are really special and worth going back to as much as, as much as you can, cuz they're easy to get to.

[00:14:51] **Dalia Colón:** You're blowing my mind right now because we're sitting in your home recording this. I live 15 minutes from you and you just named two places I've never heard of.

[00:14:58] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah, they're so good. And I bet you could tell me places I've never heard of. They're your kind of neighborhood places. So I wanna mix in, in my, you know, sort of months of adventures that we are, that we have supporting places that are local, that we know are always good and are always gonna satisfy and then getting out and exploring and testing new places that may make the rotation.

[00:15:20] **Dalia Colón:** How do you find the new places?

[00:15:22] **Kristen Hare:** I talk to a lot of people. I stalk a lot of people whose taste I respect on like Instagram or Twitter. I definitely read, uh, the Tampa Bay Times and listen to WUSF I'm just kind of have, yes, . I think I just have my Spidey Senses always out, you know, and, and open and available for new ideas. And the best thing I can ask somebody. Where do you love to go? What, what's your favorite thing? And it, I already have a long list of new things to add to the fourth edition, which I will not be doing anytime soon, but every time I ask that people come up with things I've never heard before. And you know, when I wrote the first edition of this book, as somebody who'd been here for a couple years, I, I certainly felt like, um, an outsider and felt like that was to my detriment. And what I've realized now is I probably will always be an outsider. I think a lot of people in Tampa Bay are because we didn't grow up here. We weren't born here, but that perspective helps us see things in a different way. And I, of course I missed a million things. That's exciting to me. I wanna spend the rest of my life discovering.

[00:16:27] **Dalia Colón:** Mm, I like that.

[00:16:28] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:16:28] **Dalia Colón:** Outlook because I came here in 2005 from Ohio and I still feel like an outsider.

[00:16:34] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:16:34] **Dalia Colón:** But I'll talk to my next door neighbor. Who's in his eighties and I'll say, oh, you know that park down the street. No. What are you talking about? So we can all learn from each other.

[00:16:43] Do you have any other advice for folks seeking to explore? Cuz you're so good at finding these little hidden gems. And if you need someone to come with you on the fourth edition, I'm available to be a taste tester, but excellent. But where, where do we even begin?.

[00:16:57] **Kristen Hare:** so. I mean, the book's a good place to start for sure. But really we are really lucky. Again, I, I keep harping on, you know, being the place where the rest of the world comes to visit, but it's significant and you know, that's not true when Ohio or Missouri we do live in, I mean, there are fabulous things to do there

[00:17:15] **Dalia Colón:** no you're right.

[00:17:15] **Kristen Hare:** But we, we do live in a place with really fantastic visitors bureaus, tourism, um, websites. And so be a detective and, and search things out. I have sort of a mix of three things that I do to find great things. I talk to people and find out what they love. I always check Facebook pages, Yelp reviews, you know, what is, what does their social media look like? I'm not judging them based on that, but I'm just getting a sense of, you know, is this tiny window that I'm seeing an accurate representation? Is there something outside of the frame that I should know about. And then I really try to approach each adventure with an open heart and get out of my car and off the highway and be open to finding things that would surprise and delight me that I otherwise wouldn't know about. And, um, there's some great things in Lakeland I think that that fall under that category, I have a day trip in Lakeland and spend a lot of time just driving around and stopping and going, what is this? What is this? And there's. An antique store. It's like a two level antique store called Lloyds of Lakeland.

[00:18:19] **Dalia Colón:** Oh yeah.

[00:18:20] **Kristen Hare:** And you go upstairs and there's a parrot that you should sing to sing if you sing happy birthday that she'll sing along. So I think just being open to finding things that aren't on your list or they aren't necessarily on the map. And um, if your eyes are open and hopefully if your heart's a little open, you'll be able to stumble into even more fantastic things.

[00:18:40] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, I'm feeling so inspired. now you researched and wrote this book during the pandemic.

[00:18:46] **Kristen Hare:** I did.

[00:18:46] **Dalia Colón:** Did that change the way you think about local restaurants or how did that affect this process? Because this is your third edition. So, you know what it's like to write this book during normal times.

[00:18:56] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:18:57] **Dalia Colón:** And then how did the pandemic change the way you think about food and, and our local restaurant communities?

[00:19:02] **Kristen Hare:** I think the pandemic changed the way I think about everything that's in this book and, and that includes, you know, feeling like. We needed to set a really high bar for what was in this book. It needed to be epic and unforgettable and, and worth going back to, not something you would do once and check off in a true bucket list fashion, but something that is worth adding into the rotation of things that make it great to live in Tampa Bay. Restaurants in particular though, you know, They had a really hard time in the pandemic. I think that the pandemic changed the fabric of our community in ways that it will probably take us a long time to really understand. And so I started off doing this book, wanting to celebrate places that made it, um, like LA Segunda, right. Um, yep.

[00:19:47] **Dalia Colón:** Bakery that's been around for a hundred plus years in Ybor City.

[00:19:51] **Kristen Hare:** And one of was one of three is the only one left, uh, has recently opened a new location in St. Pete

[00:19:56] **Dalia Colón:** mm-hmm. And recently bought Faedo those, which was another bakery.

[00:20:00] **Kristen Hare:** Yeah.

[00:20:00] **Dalia Colón:** So it's really stood the test of time. It's

[00:20:02] **Kristen Hare:** yeah, it has. And, and it's worth it. The food is fabulous. The guava pastries are fabulous. The people are kind when you're in there. I think just understanding that we are different than we were when 2020 started. And how can I show that in this book and encourage people to feel safe, getting out and going to eat and celebrate and, and just, you know, get outta your house and meet up with people that you missed and taste things that, you know, you couldn't replicate at home or with delivery or, you know, Uber Eats or anything else. I take really seriously now the bucket on the front of this book. And like I said, while it used to be a little bit of a joke to me, you know, maybe it's the obit writer in me, but our time is limited and I, and if we don't understand that after this pandemic, we're not going to. And so we need to use the time we have, I think really wisely and eating and drinking and adventuring with people we love, I think is a really good way to spend that time.

[00:21:01] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, Kristen. So well said, I gotta put a field trip on the calendar now for me and my family. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

[00:21:08] **Kristen Hare:** You know, I would love to hear what people's favorite things are. Tell me what I'm missing. You know, find me on Twitter, find me on Instagram. Tell me what I'm missing and don't let the tourists have all the fun.

[00:21:18] **Dalia Colón:** We certainly won't.

[00:21:19] Thank you so much.

[00:21:19] **Kristen Hare:** Thank you.

[00:21:21] **Dalia Colón:** Kristen Hare is the author of *100 Things to do in Tampa Bay Before You Die*, what do you think of her restaurant picks? And what are your foodie favorites that deserve a spot in her next book? Let's have some healthy debate. You can connect with us on Facebook and Instagram at The Zest Podcast. I'm Delia Colon. I produced The Zest with Andrew Lucas. This week. We have help from Chandler Balkcom Mark Haze and Hana Abdel Magid. The Zest is a production of WUSF Public Media. Copyright 2022.